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President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: I accepted my assignment as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and began on 11 March. I approached it with gratitude to the Secretary-General for his trust and a sense of privilege that I might get the chance to do something to bring that great tragedy to a belated end — a privilege coupled, I hope, with due humility in the face of the complexity and urgency of the challenge.

In the days since, those original feelings have, if anything, become stronger. I have been privileged to meet and to be guided by a wealth of Yemenis from all the parties and many civic organizations. I have taken up the time of leaders and listened just as eagerly to the views of the less fortunate. As is always the case, from my own experience, it has been the women whom I have met who have often spoken with the greatest clarity, as well as with the generosity that is necessary about those they fear, as well as those they support.

Public comment on Yemen, like on any other international tragedy, is copious and, sadly, often vituperative. The rhetoric on Yemen is, perhaps understandably, unforgiving and unsparing. I know, as those present do, that peace becomes possible when we see the good in our foes, even though we can see the cruelties of war clearly. My emphasis on listening to and engaging Yemenis above all other priorities is not an idle decision. We know that resolving Yemen's conflict may come only from an agreement among its leaders to put aside their differences and agree to deal with them not through battle but through dialogue and debate. To put Yemenis first, therefore, is not merely proper and right; it is also the only way we will find peace.

In my experience of trying to resolve conflicts, I have learned to take people at their word — to trust, yes, but also to verify. We should take on trust the assurances we hear, even as we know that the ultimate test is what they will deliver in practice. So when I hear positive words from one leader or another — which are often instantly the cause of derision or scepticism from the other side — my line is: let us take those good words and put them to good use.

My report today is a preliminary one. I will share what I know, and also what I fear. I will also try to identify signs of hope. My plan is to put to the Council within the next two months a framework for negotiations. There is good news and bad news. I apologize for that cliché, but it is the truth.

The good news — and it is my principal message to the members of the Council today — is that a political solution to bring an end to the war is indeed available. Its outlines are no secret. They include the end of fighting, the withdrawal of forces and the handover of heavy weapons in key locations, along with an agreement on the establishment of an inclusive Government that brings the parties together in a consensus to build peace. That can be done. All those with whom I spoke, from the widest range of the Yemeni political spectrum, have told me that they want that, that they want it quickly, that they will work with the United Nations to achieve it and that they are conscious of the consequence, as in all agreements between enemies, that mutual concessions will be required. Let me emphasize, however, that a successful outcome of negotiations, which is never to be guaranteed, will require patience, diligence and good faith between the parties.

I have come to that general conclusion by listening to the leaders of the parties. I have assured them that what the Secretary-General wishes and what the Council requires is also what all Yemenis want — a stable and secure Yemen with a Government accountable to its citizens. I am grateful to President Hadi for his time, patience and willingness to put the concerns of his people first. His Government has spared no effort to ensure that I understand their positions, needs and

willingness to engage. I count on their support, which is essential to the success of that endeavour.

I was also encouraged by my meeting with the leadership of the Ansar Allah movement in Sana'a. They assured me that their movement wants an end to the war and will cooperate with the United Nations to make that happen. That message was repeated to me in several other encounters that I was privileged to have with other senior Ansar Allah leaders. I am greatly encouraged by that constructive attitude. I have heard similar views from the leaders of an exceptionally wide variety of Yemeni political parties, and I am grateful to them, too.

I have not yet visited the south, but I have started to meet with southern groups. The conflict, as members of the Council can imagine, has brought about major changes on the ground in the southern governorates, and has made the long-standing frustrations and aspirations of southerners more prominent. There will be no peace in Yemen if we do not also listen to the voices of the south and make sure that they are included in the political arrangements that end the war.

It is no surprise that stopping a war is not at all the same as building peace, and so it goes in Yemen. We must first turn our energies to the business of stopping the war. The parties necessary for that specific task are those whose decisions can contribute to bringing an end to the war. I have been consistent in delivering the same message to them that that is the first task. A negotiated political settlement through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue is the only way to end the Yemeni conflict and address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in an ultimate form. To that end, all parties to the conflict need to abandon preconditions to talks and grant my Office unhindered, unconditional access to all relevant stakeholders, as indeed the Council asserted in its latest presidential statement on this subject, adopted in March (S/PRST/2018/5).

Building peace, however, will as always be a larger task, based on different precedents and broader participation. The national dialogue, with its impressive record of inclusion and civic participation, will be a decisive precedent. That will be the agenda of transition — to include reconciliation, which is the first item that requires our attention at the end of a conflict, constitutional review, reconstruction and the rebuilding of State institutions. It is therefore about transforming the State. Making that work will require the full involvement of civil society to ensure that the process goes beyond politics and reflects the aspirations of all Yemenis.

I said there was good news, but also bad news. There is a saying that the darkest hour is the one that comes before dawn. Let us hope that this is the case. It will not be news to the members of the Council that the war has, if anything, become louder and more pressing over the last few weeks. I am concerned about the increased number of ballistic missiles launched towards Saudi Arabia, and I note that the Council has already pronounced on that.

In addition, I am concerned about the intensified military operations in Sa'dah governorate. Military confrontations and air strikes have continued in numerous other areas of Yemen, including Sana'a, Taiz, Al-Jawf, Ma'rib, Al-Hudaydah, Hajjah, Al-Bayda and Lahij governorates. The clashes continue without major changes on the front lines, but with disturbing reports of civilian casualties. We also — and this is of great importance to us — hear unconfirmed reports that movements of forces in Yemen are on the increase and that the prospect of intensive military operations in Al-Hudaydah, long heralded, may be soon forthcoming. Our concern is simple — that any of those developments would, at a single stroke, take peace off the table. I am convinced that there is a real danger of that. We all need urgently and creatively to find ways to diminish the chances of those game-changing events upsetting and derailing the very real hopes of the great majority of Yemenis.

The people of Yemen are desperately in need of signs of hope that the war will soon end. Apart from the urgent requirement for unlimited humanitarian access — as I am certain Mark Lowcock will mention later — there are other measures that may provide some hope. We have, for example, with the encouragement of political leaders from all sides, been working to get Sana'a airport reopened to air traffic and to ensure the right of Yemenis to travel and rejoin their families. We are also eager to arrange the release and exchange of prisoners. Both sides have told me that they would like to see all prisoners released. I am very encouraged by that. We will do all we can to make it happen, and we will report back to the Council on progress.

We are also very concerned about the issue of detentions carried out by all sides. We know from experience elsewhere that the arbitrary and widespread

detention of civilians in armed conflict is both a terrible abuse and a fundamental impediment to the recovery of a stable society and reconciliation, which is central to peace. Those are important confidence-building issues. Even more important is the heroic work being done daily by humanitarian agencies in Yemen under the leadership of Mark Lowcock and my good friend and colleague Lise Grande.

The members of the Council know better than I do the strategic importance of stability in Yemen. It is of primary importance for its people, its neighbours and the wider international community. It can be achieved only by ensuring a stable Yemen where terrorist activity can finally be focused upon and eliminated and the safety of its sea lanes can be relied upon. Making that happen requires an effective synergy between mediation, in which I have a role, and diplomacy, in which the Council does. Mediation without the backing of diplomacy will certainly fail. We will do whatever we can to find agreements that work among Yemenis, but it is for the members of the Council and other Member States, from time to time, to put the force of international opinion behind such agreements, and the Security Council's unity and resolve will be decisive.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Griffiths for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Yemen remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Three quarters of the population — more than 22 million people — urgently require some form of humanitarian help, including 8.4 million people who are struggling to find their next meal. The crisis is overwhelming families and institutions and is now affecting nearly every sector and aspect of Yemeni life. With swift and joint action, conditions for the Yemeni people can improve. On the political front, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Martin Griffiths just briefed the Security Council.

Humanitarian agencies have scaled up assistance and strengthened their capacity in Yemen. The relief operation is one of the largest and most complex in the world. One hundred and ninety partners, most of them Yemeni, get help to millions of people in thousands of locations every single month. Last year, we increased the coverage of food assistance from 3 million people a month in January to more than 7 million a month in December. For 2018, the World Food Programme has plans to reach 10 million people a month, and we are doing the same thing in other sectors, including water, health, sanitation and other core services.

The humanitarian operation in Yemen is already one of the largest in the world. We have five humanitarian hubs in place to coordinate assistance across the country, and we are exploring opening more, including in Ma'rib and Mukalla. Every week, dozens of humanitarian movements, including food convoys, and hundreds of specific humanitarian locations are deconflicted by the parties to the conflict. We are able to reach people in all 333 districts, and in each district we aim to collect data on how many people receive aid every month.

Earlier this month, Sweden, Switzerland and the Secretary-General co-chaired a pledging conference for Yemen. In the words of the Secretary-General, "It was a remarkable success of international solidarity". Forty Member States and regional organizations pledged more than $2 billion. I thank them for that generosity. Allow me particularly to recognize the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for their $930 million contribution to the humanitarian response plan. That was not just an exceptionally large contribution; it was also prompt, swift, unearmarked and unconditional, and it has already been fully disbursed.

All parties to the conflict must take practical steps to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. The record on that issue remains mixed. There have been improvements. United Nations humanitarian flights and vessels are moving regularly. That is positive, but we remain very concerned about commercial imports through all of Yemen's ports, most particularly Al-Hudaydah and Saleef. Before the war, Yemen relied on imports to cover 90 per cent of staple foods and nearly all its medicine and fuel needs. Commercial shortages and delays at ports have led to sharp increases in the price of food and household necessities. Ports are the lifeline of Yemen. We are doing our part to ensure that they can function properly. I am pleased to confirm that steps are being taken to further strengthen the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism, which screens commercial shipments to Al-Hudaydah and Saleef ports.

We are encouraging all those concerned to accelerate the normalization of commercial shipments into Al-Hudaydah and Saleef, as well as to Yemen's other ports. We are worried that shipping companies

are reluctant to enter Yemeni waters. The reasons are related to problems with foreign exchange and the banking sector, as well as the ports, but the result is that insufficient food is being imported. That needs to be addressed. Price increases, especially of food, are forcing hundreds of thousands of destitute families to turn to humanitarian assistance for their very survival.

We are also concerned that Sana'a airport remains closed to commercial traffic, thereby preventing thousands of critically ill patients from travelling abroad to seek treatment unavailable in Yemen. On several occasions, over the past month, military activities conducted in the proximity of the airport have affected humanitarian flights. Last week, there were serious incidents close to humanitarian locations that had been deconflicted. We are working closely with all parties to ensure that they are not repeated.

Within Yemen, bureaucratic impediments imposed by decision-makers in Sana'a are affecting relief operations. Humanitarian staff continue to face delays with regard to visas and project approvals, restrictions on imports and customs clearance, and long delays and searches at checkpoints. In recent weeks, some of the media in Sana'a have depicted humanitarian operations inaccurately and unjustly, and humanitarian staff have been detained. We are also concerned about insecurity in parts of the country, particularly in the south. While we have partial access to all of Yemen's 333 districts, restrictions and insecurity mean that an estimated 1.2 million people in need of assistance live in areas inaccessible to humanitarian organizations. All impediments that prevent humanitarians from reaching people must stop.

Looking ahead, we continue to face enormous challenges. Unless steps are taken now in high-risk districts, we will risk another major cholera outbreak. Last year's outbreak of cholera and watery diarrhoea struck more than a million people. The effects continue to linger. As we enter the rainy season, the conditions that created this outbreak are still present. Applying the lessons from last year, we are doing everything we can to respond. Agencies are pre-positioning supplies, chlorinating water sources and launching a vaccination campaign.

As with other challenges, a successful response requires safe, unimpeded and unhindered access across and into Yemen for humanitarian staff and humanitarian supplies. We need predictable fuel imports to keep hospitals and water treatment plants running. Yemeni public servants who are doing so much themselves to prepare for and respond to the crisis need their salaries paid. Most health and sanitation workers have still not been paid for more than a year and a half.

The impact of air strikes, shelling and fighting on the civilian population, particularly in Al-Hudaydah, Taiz, Saada, Hadramut and Hajjah governorates is deeply worrying. Civilian lives are lost. Public infrastructure is destroyed. Displacement is increasing. Mines and the remnants of war affect agricultural production and the wider economy, as well as threatening civilian life. Some 3 million women and girls are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

Like the Special Envoy, I too remain very concerned about missiles being launched into Saudi Arabia from within Yemen. That adds a further dimension to the civil war and puts many civilians at great risk. I want to remind all parties that they have obligations under international humanitarian law. Restraint is needed to avoid any escalation that would worsen still further the suffering of ordinary people.

While the humanitarian response can do, and is doing, a lot, it cannot resolve this crisis. I therefore echo the Special Envoy's call for all parties to engage meaningfully with the United Nations without preconditions to achieve a lasting negotiated settlement towards sustainable peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I welcome the new Special Envoy and thank him for his briefing. I also thank Mr. Lowcock for his assessment and welcome our Yemeni colleagues.

It is a desperate situation and it is clear, as the Special Envoy set out, that it can be resolved, ultimately, only through a political solution. I think we all agree on that. I think what the Under-Secretary-General said about the humanitarian consequences — particularly 8 million people being close to starvation and 1 million people at risk of cholera and similar illnesses — is absolutely shocking and ought to be a spur to action for the Council. I think the international community must do whatever it can to enable the Special Envoy to develop his plan at the pace that he has just outlined to

us. I welcome the clarity and the elements of the plan he set out. I hope we can, as an international community, pool all our influence and urge the parties to engage in good faith with the United Nations process. Although the conflict has some quite desperate humanitarian consequences, it is a solvable conflict.

The Under-Secretary-General said that if we took swift and joint action, then we could make some very good progress. That is absolutely where we should put our efforts. As a Council, I hope that we can encourage people to grant full and unhindered access to Yemen for the Special Envoy, for his team and for the humanitarian actors. In that respect, the meetings that the Envoy laid out in the region, including in Sana'a with senior Houthi leaders, are extremely welcome. I would like to highlight a couple of areas for specific immediate action.

The Under-Secretary-General mentioned financial pledges, and I agree that the scale of the generosity from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait are all quite remarkable. We ourselves, as the United Kingdom, have provided $250 million for this year and next. I think we all know that money alone will not be enough. We need to do more to get commercial supplies in. I was concerned about the foreign exchange problem, because in Yemen a lot of the food and supplies that go in need to come from commercial sources. Humanitarian assistance cannot manage the scale required. Commercial shipping needs to be able to go in as it is vital to water and sanitation systems. I do hope we can all find ways to urge collaboration in that regard.

My second point is about access to Houthi-controlled areas where we see many severely malnourished children. The presidential statement adopted in March (S/PRST/2018/5) highlighted the importance of vaccination campaigns, as the Under-Secretary General said.

Thirdly, I want to echo the call about paying non-military public workers. Families do not have the means to buy food. They do not have the means to buy medicine and half of the health facilities have closed. That is all contributing to a more desperate situation in Yemen than needs to be, objectively, the case.

I would now like to turn to regional stability. The conflict's impact on regional stability is growing and it is dangerous. It puts Saudi Arabia at risk and puts Saudi citizens at risk. The continued Houthi missile attacks, including the use of ballistic missiles, at civilian targets in Saudi Arabia attract our outright condemnation. The deliberate targeting of civilian areas is abhorrent. It is against international law and against international humanitarian law. We call on all parties involved in the conflict to abide by their international humanitarian law obligations. And as the Under-Secretary General set out, that is still not being done to a sufficient degree.

I also want to stress that it really is a national security threat to Saudi Arabia and that, in turn, is driving renewed conflict on the ground. So it is vital and I hope the Council can help ensure that all Member States fully implement the arms embargo that the Council has imposed.

In particular, the Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by resolution 2342 (2017) has concluded that missiles and related to material of Iranian origin was introduced into Yemen after the imposition of the targeted arms embargo. That, in turn, means that Iran is in non-compliance with resolution 2216 (2015). We strongly urge Iran to desist from destabilizing activity and we encourage all Member States to use whatever influence they have to ensure that the supply of missiles fuelling the conflict inside Yemen stops.

I want to stress the Special Envoy's remarks about it being possible to make progress. We have within our grasp the ability to do something to help bring this conflict to an end. That is a very important contribution that the Council can make for regional and international peace and security at a time when we see so many problems on so many other issues. I would like to conclude by urging all members of the Council to put our shoulders to the wheel to support the United Nations and to try to bring peace to Yemen.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

The delegation of the United States welcomes Special Envoy Griffiths to the Council. He has taken on one of the world's most difficult diplomatic assignments and we thank him for it. The United States fully supports his efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Yemen. We especially appreciate that he has quickly reached out to all of the Yemeni parties involved. We hope that all parties will engage with the United Nations without preconditions going forward.

The situation in Yemen is an issue on which it should be easy for all members of the Security Council

to agree. Yemen is not Syria. We agree that there needs to be peace in Yemen and that the war has taken a horrifying toll on the Yemeni people. Government services, such as schools, hospitals and clean water, barely exist anymore.

Such chaos is the perfect environment for terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, to find a safe haven and to plan attacks that could threaten us all. Finding peace is urgent. However, pushing for peace also requires that we do not reward bad behaviour. Iran, and the Houthis in particular, need a much better understanding of our seriousness when it comes to their destabilizing activity. Just because we seek peace does not mean that we look the other way when they take steps to make the war even worse.

In order to achieve enduring peace in Yemen, Iran must end its interference and its violations of the arms embargo that the Security Council imposed. Last week, the Houthis launched yet another round of ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia. At the end of March, debris from a Houthi missile attack against the capital of Saudi Arabia killed a civilian. We warned earlier that it was only a matter of time before the Houthi attacks caused civilian casualties in Saudi Arabia. That prediction has now come true.

With each day that passes, the risk of greater regional conflict increases. Yet the Security Council has not acted to hold the Houthis and Iran accountable for weapons that violate the arms embargo and resolution 2216 (2015). We all went to Washington, D.C., to see the missiles first hand and that the missiles found in Saudi Arabia had originated in Iran. The independent and impartial Panel of Experts on Yemen then corroborated what we showed the Council and affirmed Iran's non-compliance with resolution 2216 (2015).

The evidence exists and it is strong. The Houthis did not work out on their own how to build and to fire ballistic missiles more than 1,000 kilometres to hit the Saudi capital. Iran is supporting them. Action by the Security Council to stop the flow of arms to the Houthis would be a step forward in helping to resolve the war. The Houthis must realize that if they continue to use banned weapons of war, the international community will be united in condemning them. The United States supports the ability of our Saudi partners to defend their borders against those threats. In the Council, we will continue to push for real accountability.

The Houthis show no sign of stopping their missile launches towards Saudi Arabia. It is imperative that the Security Council come together to make clear that such provocations are unacceptable. We hope that all parties, especially the Houthis, see the arrival of Mr. Griffiths as an opportunity to start down a new path. The time is long past for all parties to show flexibility and restraint in the service of a real negotiated settlement. I suspect that if we could hear from ordinary Yemenis, they would send the same message.

The United Nations has emphasized the dire humanitarian stakes. The bottom line is that 18 million Yemenis do not know where their next meal will come from. Something has to change. That is why the United States emphasizes once again that all parties must do more to expand access for commercial goods and humanitarian aid to reach the Yemeni people. We are doing our part. We funded four mobile cranes for the port of Al-Hudaydah, which we expect to increase the flow of goods through the port. The United States also supports the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen as a tool that helps address the threat of weapons smuggling, while also helping ships with legitimate cargo to reach Yemen. It is vital that the port of Hudaydah remain open to commercial and humanitarian traffic, and we appreciate the steps that the parties have taken to keep the port functioning. Beyond reaching the port, aid workers should be able to move freely throughout the country in order to deliver the humanitarian assistance to those in need.

The United States has also joined donors in taking steps to respond to the humanitarian crisis. We have announced nearly $87 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen this fiscal year. We applaud Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in particular for putting forward almost $1 billion towards the United Nations humanitarian response.

As long as the war continues, the parties must be careful how they plan and carry out attacks so as to reduce human suffering on the ground. We have called on all parties to take appropriate measures to mitigate the risk of civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. The United States is working to provide support to the Saudi-led coalition, while minimizing the number of civilian casualties. The Houthis must halt their indiscriminate shelling and ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered without any diversion or delays. The war in Yemen is at a critical turning point. We have a new Envoy, who is ready to promote peace.

The Security Council can take steps to address the provocations by the Houthis from ballistic missiles, to promote humanitarian access and to support a return to talks. Those are the goals that we all ought to share. As the Security Council, we should therefore not hesitate to take action to achieve them. That means not being afraid to identify the Houthis and their Iranian patrons by name in future resolutions. That means actually leaning on the parties to negotiate in good faith in the United Nations process. That means responding generously to the United Nations humanitarian appeals and standing by our demands for unfettered humanitarian access. If we do those things, we can lay the groundwork for an enduring political settlement.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to begin by welcoming Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to the Security Council in his new role for the first time and to thank him for his very clear briefing this morning. We share his deep concern about the risks of escalation. However, we also see the opportunities that he outlined. As he pointed out, in Yemen the stakes are high whether with regard to the humanitarian situation, regional stability or the spread of terrorism. I would like to encourage him to continue to reach out to those strong and women peers to whom he referred. It is clear to us that the active participation of women in the peace process will be decisive. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing today, as well as for his efforts to address the humanitarian situation in Yemen and to ensure that it remains high on our agenda and that of the international community.

I will focus on two points in my intervention: first, the political situation and the need to strongly support the resumption of a United Nations-led political process; and, secondly, the humanitarian situation and the need to implement the March presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/5).

First, on the political situation, the appointment of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths provides an opportunity to relaunch the political process in Yemen. It is essential that the Council now unite in giving the Special Envoy its strong support and that we stay focused on making use of this opportunity. The members of the Council and regional actors must now use all their influence to ensure that all the parties engage with the Special Envoy and the United Nations-led process in good faith and without preconditions.

We encourage the parties to now move forward quickly on confidence-building measures, such as those related to Sana'a airport and the release of prisoners. It also seems clear that the southern question will need to be addressed in those discussions.

Mr. Griffiths has made a very good start to his challenging task. We are encouraged by his early visit to Yemen and the region, and we fully support the efforts to pursue broad consultations with an inclusive approach. Full and unhindered access to all the relevant parties in Yemen is critical.

Moving on to the humanitarian situation, on 15 March the Security Council unanimously adopted a statement by the President (S/PRST/2018/5) that recognizes the vast humanitarian needs and the immediate steps that must be taken in order to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. Those steps were based on the obligation of the parties to respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

However, regrettably, the implementation of that strong and clear statement by the Council is clearly lacking. Restrictions, delays and uncertainty at ports, such as Al-Hudaydah and Saleef, hinder humanitarian and commercial imports. Delays and obstacles to the clearance process of the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen for vessels continue and act as a deterrent to private shipping companies.

Even when supplies reach the country, access within it remains a serious challenge owing to the many bureaucratic impediments and checkpoints. To date, no humanitarian evacuations, even for emergency treatment, have been allowed through Sana'a airport. Strikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure continue from all sides.

We have also seen renewed missile attacks from Houthi-held territory targeting Saudi Arabia, which our Foreign Minister has strongly condemned. Clearly, the violations of international humanitarian law continue, and accountability for such violations remains to be attributed. It is time to move from words to action with respect to the situation in Yemen. It is time for the Council to demand that its decisions be implemented in full. It is time to actively and urgently engage the parties and to ensure that the will of the Council is heeded.

Sweden's Special Envoy for Yemen, Ambassador Peter Semneby, visited Sana'a and Aden in late March.

While there, he met with representatives of the Yemeni Government, the Houthis, the General People's Congress and the Southern Transitional Council. He also met with the international, regional and local civil society actors, as well as internally displaced persons and other victims of the conflict. During his visit, the Ambassador urged the parties to engage with the United Nations-led political process and to respect international humanitarian law, including protecting civilians and eliminating all obstacles to humanitarian assistance. The presidential statement provided by the Council provides a good basis for such discussions and should be used by all Council members. Despite the many and well-known challenges, in his meetings, the parties showed the same signs of an increased willingness to engage in a United Nations-led process that Mr. Griffiths referred to earlier today. We must use that momentum.

As one of the co-hosts of the high-level pledging event for Yemen in Geneva on 3 April, we wish to join Mr. Lowcock in thanking all those donors that participated, resulting in pledges of over $2 billion to the Yemen humanitarian response plan. The pledges made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will contribute significantly to the implementation of the United Nations emergency response plan. We now call on all donors to make their disbursements as soon as possible. The panel discussion on humanitarian access that formed part of that conference demonstrated with clarity how difficult it is for United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors to operate in Yemen. It is clear that without addressing that fundamental issue, the funds raised will not be able to reach those in need as effectively as they should.

In conclusion, the 15 March presidential statement was our strongest yet on the humanitarian situation in Yemen. It reflected the urgency on the ground; however, over one month later this urgency remains. We must make every effort to ensure implementation, while, at the same time supporting the Special Envoy. The desperate situation in Yemen demands greater attention by the international community, and the Council should further step up its efforts in the coming weeks and months to provide united support.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Martin Griffiths for his very detailed and illuminating briefing and for his initial assessment of the steps needed to revive political negotiations in the difficult situation we are seeing. I would like to assure the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen of the full support and faith of France. I also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his efforts and for his briefing, which shows how worrying the situation is in Yemen.

Today I will focus on three points: the growing intensity of the Yemeni conflict and the regional impact of the crisis; the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation; and the need to relaunch the political process.

We are all aware of the gravity of the situation in Yemen. France has consistently called on the parties to resume the path of negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations without preconditions, because, as we all know, there is no military solution to the conflict. We also emphasize the urgent need to lay down weapons.

In that context, the latest firing of missiles into Saudi Arabia is unacceptable and must stop. In addition to the gravity of those indiscriminate missile launches and their impact on regional security and stability, they reduce the potential of a political outcome in Yemen. We have repeatedly expressed our concern about the launching of Houthi ballistic missiles into Saudi Arabia and the Red Sea and have condemned those launches. In this extremely tense regional context, we call for calm from the parties. Let us also bear in mind that the continuation of the conflict benefits only terrorist groups, who use the chaos to strengthen and expand their presence. That is an important factor that must bring us together.

The first victims of this conflict are civilians, in a context where the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. This humanitarian crisis is among the most serious in the world. We have repeatedly welcomed the announcement of the Coalition's humanitarian plan, which is a positive and encouraging step. We also welcome the adoption of the recent presidential statement S/PRST/2018/5, which defines the humanitarian road map. Finally, the donor conference held earlier this month in Geneva enabled the mobilization of about $2 billion for the 2018 Yemen humanitarian response plan. That is a very good result, even though the gap has not yet been completely filled.

In that context, access to humanitarian aid remains our main concern. It is crucial that all parties ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian

assistance and commercial supplies to those in need. Access to all ports and airports, including the ports of Al-Hudayda, Saleef and Sana'a airport, must be fully assured and kept open. In that regard, we welcome the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism, which is intended to shorten the waiting time for commercial vessels. It is essential that supplies cover all needs, be they food, medicine or gasoline. The current coverage rate is still insufficient, especially for fuel.

Another top priority is to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law in order to protect civilian populations and humanitarian and medical personnel. The parties must respect the zones and periods reserved for the arrival of supplies and humanitarian and medical personnel. I am referring in particular to Sana'a airport.

We remain concerned about the situation of displaced persons, and specifically about the vulnerability of over 3 million women at risk of sexual violence, as well as the threat of a new cholera and diphtheria epidemic in the coming months. The parties must help the United Nations respond to that danger in at-risk regions.

France will remain fully mobilized to concretely improve the situation of the Yemeni population. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, has announced that a humanitarian conference on Yemen will be held by this summer in Paris in order to launch new initiatives for the civilian population and better protect them from violations of international humanitarian law. Naturally, we wish to be in close contact with the Special Envoy, Mr. Martin Griffiths, but also with Mr. Mark Lowcock, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as relevant United Nations agencies in order to prepare this conference properly.

In that critical context, we must, alongside our humanitarian commitment, remain more mobilized than ever to support a new political dynamic — the only sustainable outcome to this conflict. The arrival of Martin Griffiths gives the opportunity to all parties to re-engage seriously without preconditions in the negotiations. To carry out its mission, the Special Envoy must have access to all regions and countries where he wishes to go, without any party preventing or jeopardizing his movements.

In the same spirit, we must continue to convey to regional actors a clear message on the need to play a responsible and constructive role in Yemen. We believe that everyone can contribute to a solution. Our common goal must be to achieve a lasting cessation of hostilities and to encourage the parties, in support of United Nations mediation, to resume dialogue for a comprehensive and inclusive political agreement, while respecting the territorial integrity of the country.

Finally, the unity of the Security Council is of vital importance, and we — individually and collectively — have a role to play in that regard. The robust and united support of the international community is indeed essential if we are to prompt the parties to resume the path of dialogue. Despite the scale of the difficulties we are experiencing, there is now an encouraging alignment of the planets that could create a historic opportunity to end the Yemeni conflict. Let us work together to bring about the conditions for such an outcome by supporting the Special Envoy. Council members can rest assured of France's firm commitment to that end.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to start by expressing its sincere thanks to both our briefers, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Martin Griffiths and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, for their very clear and comprehensive briefings. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Griffiths to the Security Council and to reiterate our full support for his efforts.

Today I would like to focus on three aspects: the peace process, the enduring humanitarian crisis and the need to address Yemen's economic challenges.

First, with regard to the political process, 2018 could be a crucial year. The appointment of a new envoy brings with it opportunities for renewed dialogue — dialogue that is so desperately needed as we move into the conflict's fourth year. It is up to all parties to the conflict to seize these opportunities and do so without preconditions.

We condemn the continued launching of ballistic missiles by the Houthis and call on all parties to the conflict to refrain from taking steps that would lead to further escalation. We welcome the Special Envoy's extensive and inclusive outreach in his first weeks in office, during which he spoke to Yemenis from all sides of the conflict, as well as countries in the region. I would particularly like to welcome what the Special Envoy said about including women in that outreach. We

strongly support that inclusive approach and call on all parties to allow full access to the Special Envoy.

In absence of a ceasefire, the impact of hostilities on civilians remains of great concern. Human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law are being reported too often. We once again urgently call for full compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. As the war drags on, the need for accountability becomes ever more prominent. Without it, a negotiated political settlement has little chance of sustaining itself.

Secondly, in the absence of a political settlement, we call the Council's attention to the humanitarian crisis. The pledging of $2 billion at the humanitarian conference in Geneva is a positive step. We welcome the quick disbursement of the generous pledge of almost $1 billion by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. We call on all Member States to follow this example and disburse their pledges as soon as possible.

At the same time, pledges mean little if access is not ensured. We call for the full implementation of the presidential statement of 15 March (S/PRST/2018/5), particularly the Council's clear call for the full and sustained opening of all Yemen's ports for both humanitarian and commercial goods. It is deeply worrying that commercial food imports are still not at the level that they were before the blockade was imposed in November 2017. At the start of 2018, 8.4 million people were severely food insecure and at risk of starvation, which represents a 24 per cent increase since 2017.

The United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) has a crucial role to play in restoring the confidence of commercial shippers that have stayed away since the start of the blockade. UNVIM has our full support, and we welcome the recent steps taken to address this issue. It is equally important that goods that have entered Yemen reach the people who need them the most. Unimpeded access throughout Yemen is essential, and unnecessary bureaucratic impediments should be removed by all parties.

My third point is about the economy. Yemen cannot survive on humanitarian aid alone. Due to inflation and loss of income for many Yemenis, access to commercially available supplies is rapidly decreasing. It is essential that public sector salaries be paid across Yemen — not only to provide income to millions of Yemenis in need but also to enable the resumption of essential public services, especially in the health and sanitation sectors. With summer approaching, the threat of a renewed cholera outbreak makes this issue even more pressing.

In conclusion, the following steps need to be taken by all parties to the conflict. Further escalation must be prevented. Parties must engage with the new Special Envoy without preconditions. Full and sustained humanitarian and commercial access into and throughout Yemen must be allowed. Urgent steps must be taken to resume the payment of salaries and restore public services. After more than three years of conflict, the Yemeni people deserve nothing less than our maximum efforts.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by once again congratulating once again Mr. Martin Griffiths on his appointment as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen. I wish him and his team every success. We express our appreciation to Mr. Griffiths and to Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, and thank them for their valuable and important briefings on developments pertaining to the humanitarian and political situation in Yemen.

I would like to emphasize three major points today: the political and security developments, the humanitarian situation and the message that the Security Council must send out.

With regard to the political and security developments, we have heard just now on the political level from Mr. Griffiths about the outcome of a number of meetings he held with Yemeni parties since he took up his role as Special Envoy. I would like to express our full support for his efforts as well as the efforts of the United Nations to resolve the conflict in Yemen in a peaceful manner.

The State of Kuwait is convinced that there can be no military or humanitarian solution for Yemen. The solution will have to be political and it must be based on the three political references — the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the outcome of the National Dialogue and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2216 (2015). Furthermore, we welcome the 19 March statement issued by Mr. Griffiths's Office where he says that he plans to revive the political process between the Yemeni parties in accordance with those three references, and to complete previous consultations, including consultations that took place in Kuwait in 2016 during which both parties were

almost ready to sign an agreement putting an end to the fighting and the suffering of the Yemeni people.

On the security front, the deliberate attacks by the Houthis against populated areas in Saudi Arabia show that Houthis are defying the will of the international community and working against a political solution to put an end to the suffering of the Yemeni people. We reiterate our condemnation in the strongest terms of the attacks using ballistic missiles against Saudi Arabia, the threats made against neighbouring countries, as well as the threats made to maritime shipping at Bab-Almandab in the Red Sea. All of those aspects are a danger for regional and international peace. We support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in all measures that it is planning to take in order to safeguard its security and stability.

The Security Council also adopted a very clear, explicit and unified position to condemn the ballistic-missile attacks against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The presidential statement of 15 March (S/PRST/2018/5) condemned in the strongest terms the ballistic-missile attacks. Later, on 28 March, the Council issued a statement to the press (SC/13270) in which it robustly condemned the ballistic-missile attacks, which had targeted cities in Saudi Arabia, including the capital Riyadh, and demanded an end to such attacks. In response, the Houthis have done nothing but continue to launch missiles, which shows once again that they are in clear defiance and not being earnest. They stick to military escalation and violence, and not to peace and dialogue. We underscore that all Member States must respect the arms embargo pursuant to resolution 2216 (2015).

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we welcome the outcome of the donor conference on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which was held in Geneva and organized by the United Nations, Switzerland and Sweden. The conference was able to garner contributions amounting to $2 billion dollars. At that conference, the State of Kuwait pledged to provide $250 million in humanitarian assistance to Yemen. We call on members to uphold those commitments given the urgent humanitarian needs in Yemen. We also welcome the $1 billion joint contribution announced by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the generous contributions of the United Kingdom and other countries. We hope that those contributions will improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen this year.

Pertaining to the Security Council message, the Council must remain unified and firm in the light of the crisis in Yemen. The Council must send a clear message to all parties in Yemen, in particular the Houthis, that they cannot continue to defy Security Council resolutions and international law and refrain from engaging in the political process. It is unacceptable to put personal interests and political ambitions over the interests of an entire people. It is also unacceptable at all that ballistic missile attacks continue to be carried out against neighbouring countries, threatening vessels crossing Bab-Almandab and the Red Sea. That is a serious threat to regional and international peace and security.

The ideal solution to the crisis must be centred on the three reference points I mentioned and must ensure the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen and respect for its constitutional order. Any interference in Yemen's internal affairs must be rejected. That was affirmed at the Arab summit held in Saudi Arabia a few days ago. We urge the Yemeni stakeholders to work together with the Special Envoy in that regard.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I join others in congratulating Special Envoy Martin Griffiths on his first briefing in the Chamber. I thank him for his initial report and convey our readiness to extend our full support to him and his mission. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing.

We commend the sterling contribution of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), especially in providing increased medical supplies and rendering life-saving services and surgical procedures. Kazakhstan reiterates its support for the selfless commitment of OCHA and other humanitarian organizations to easing the suffering of the Yemeni people in their present difficult circumstances. Since the start of this month, humanitarian partners have provided about 60,000 people with emergency assistance. Over 2 million people, 90 per cent of whom fled their homes more than a year ago, still remain displaced across the country owing to the conflict. It is necessary to increase humanitarian emergency aid and provide unhindered access to all areas of Yemen. We emphasize that all obligations under international humanitarian law must be respected and all parties must take responsibility to mitigate the humanitarian

situation by cooperating fully with the United Nations and relevant humanitarian organizations.

The large-scale vaccination campaign to control the spread of diphtheria in Yemen, undertaken by WHO, UNICEF and health authorities, is noteworthy. That campaign targeted nearly 2.7 million children between the ages of 6 weeks and 15 years old in 11 governorates. As of 1 March, the World Food Programme had provided over 6 million people with emergency food assistance and nearly 2 million people with safe drinking water by rehabilitating urban water systems and rural water programmes and water was delivered to nearly 375,000 of the most vulnerable internally displaced persons.

My delegation welcomes the coalition's decision to keep open all of Yemen's main ports, including Al-Hudaydah and Saleef, in order to allow access to humanitarian and commercial cargo without restrictions, similar to the previous situation when Yemen was importing 90 per cent of its food staples. Maintaining the flow of those imports is absolutely essential for humanitarian assistance.

On the political track, we are alarmed by the resurgence of hostilities in Yemen, particularly in Yemen's southern Al-Hudaydah governorate, which is about 100 kilometres south of Al-Hudaydah port, and in the Sana'a governorate in northern Yemen. Air strikes and clashes have also intensified in neighbouring Al-Jawf governorate. Kazakhstan therefore calls on all parties to commit themselves to establishing a new regime for the cessation of hostilities. Such a temporary respite would create conditions for the resumption of negotiations.

It is obvious that solving all outstanding issues and stabilizing the country will require many years of additional effort and the involvement of the international community. However, the cessation of hostilities will provide an opportunity to revive the economy, resolve the humanitarian crisis and restore basic public services to the population, which has been severely affected over the past three years. Achieving that goal should be a priority for the Council.

In general, the Security Council should work more resolutely to resolve the Yemeni conflict and focus on stabilizing the situation in the entire region, combating terrorism, implementing the humanitarian mission in order to preserve civilian lives, and bringing about an end to the war in the country. The Special Envoy plays a key role in that regard. We have repeatedly said that balanced external support for a settlement in Yemen could effectively complement the work of the Special Envoy. The search for a peaceful resolution to the conflict through dialogue and confidence-building measures should be intensified, and an urgent, universal ceasefire without preconditions must be reached.

Victory cannot be achieved exclusively by military means. It is necessary to prevent the splitting of the country. All parties in Yemen must seek compromises and reject unilateral decisions that could harm the peace process. At the same time, the parties to the conflict are obliged to refrain from committing acts that could lead to an escalation of the regional situation and insecurity. It is not acceptable to conduct rocket attacks against civilian targets on the territory of Saudi Arabia, and Kazakhstan strongly condemns those attacks. All parties should exercise restraint amid mounting tensions. A military escalation is not a solution.

Yemen is the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 22 million people — three quarters of the population — in need of humanitarian aid and protection. Under such critical conditions, it is important that the United Nations initiate a plan for further action. We were pleased that, in Geneva on 3 April, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and more than 30 other countries generously pledged over $2 billion to support the humanitarian response in Yemen. Kazakhstan was also part of that effort. We endorse the Secretary-General's view that humanitarian resources are very important, but they are not enough. It is essential that they reach people in need.

Lastly, we also call upon the parties to the conflict to demonstrate sincerity and flexibility, to avoid disagreements in the course of consultations and to properly resolve complex issues, in particular the withdrawal of forces, disarmament and the formation of a Government of national consent, in order to achieve a comprehensive settlement, taking into account the national conditions in Yemen and the concerns of all parties. We fully agree with the words of the Secretary-General that a negotiated political settlement, through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue, is the only solution.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Let me begin by welcoming the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, and by expressing Poland's full support to him and his Office in their endeavour to relaunch the political process in Yemen. I

also thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation in the country.

First, I would like to underline the urgent need to resume the political process in Yemen. Poland is deeply convinced that the primary responsibility of the Security Council is to pave the way for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Let me echo what has been said by many speakers. Only a genuine, inclusive, intra-Yemeni political process can bring about long-standing peace and put an end to the tremendous suffering of civilians, who continue to bear the brunt of ongoing hostilities.

We perceive Mr. Griffiths's assumption of the post of Special Envoy as a unique opportunity to resume peace negotiations, which should be carried out with the full participation of all relevant parties and stakeholders, as well as all groups of Yemeni society, including women and youth. We encourage actors in the region with influence on the parties to the conflict to convince them to engage constructively with Mr. Griffiths and his Office and to participate in the United Nations-led process in good faith and without preconditions.

Let me turn to the humanitarian situation. I would like to express Poland's highest appreciation to the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland, which, together with the United Nations, hosted the high-level pledging event for Yemen earlier this month. Like other members of the Council, we welcome the outcome of that event, which confirmed the commitment of the international community to alleviating the suffering of the Yemeni people.

As we have heard from Mr. Mark Lowcock, despite some positive developments, the humanitarian situation in Yemen remains desperate. The widespread fighting, severe economic decline and food insecurity continue to take an enormous toll on the population. We believe that, in order to improve the situation of civilians, it is essential to ensure that public sector salaries are paid across Yemen in order to enable the resumption of essential public services, including health care and education. Sustained deliveries of humanitarian and commercial goods, including food, fuel and medical imports, must be guaranteed. Therefore, we urge all parties to the conflict to fully comply with the provisions of the presidential statement adopted by the Council on 15 March (S/PRST/2018/5) and ensure that all Yemeni ports remain open and fully functional. We also urge the parties to facilitate access for humanitarian operations across the whole territory.

With regard to the ongoing hostilities in Yemen, we again call upon the parties to refrain from taking action that might lead to the escalation of fighting. Poland strongly condemns all indiscriminate attacks, including air strikes, which have a disastrous impact on civilians. We also strongly condemn ballistic-missile attacks carried out by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia. All parties are obliged under international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian infrastructure. We also call upon all sides to fully cooperate with the group of international and regional eminent experts on Yemen to allow for a comprehensive examination of all alleged human rights violations and abuses. Finally, we reiterate the call for a cessation of hostilities in Yemen.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Griffiths, and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings. We welcome Mr. Griffiths's assumption of the important post of Special Envoy.

Yemen's political process is currently at a stalemate, military conflicts continue and the humanitarian crisis remains serious. The international community should step up its mediation efforts, encourage all parties in Yemen to broker a ceasefire and return to the path to a political solution in order to achieve peace, security and stability in Yemen as soon as possible. A political solution is the only way to achieve lasting peace in Yemen. The international community should continue to support Yemen's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. It is imperative to support the meditation efforts of the United Nations, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, its Implementation Mechanism and the National Dialogue Conference outcome documents, and engage in dialogue and negotiations in order to reach an inclusive settlement to the issue as soon as possible.

The Security Council and relevant parties should remain united, support the mediation efforts of Special Envoy Griffiths, strengthen efforts for peace talks and negotiations and encourage all parties to the conflict to break the stalemate as soon as possible in order to resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiations. It is important to support the Special Envoy in his efforts to develop a road map or plan of

action as soon as possible towards a political solution to the situation in Yemen. The international community and countries of the region should provide constructive assistance in that regard.

The current humanitarian situation in Yemen is dire. Cholera persists and millions of people face severe famine. The international community should provide greater humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people. China welcomes the successful holding of the Geneva high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen in Geneva. Through bilateral means and its cooperation with the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, China has provided humanitarian assistance to Yemen totalling RMB150 million, in order to ease the famine and eradicate cholera. We will continue to provide assistance to the people of Yemen to the best of our ability.

Ensuring smooth humanitarian access to Yemen is key to mitigating the humanitarian crisis. The relevant parties should work together to provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access to create the conditions to ease the humanitarian situation in Yemen. China is ready to work with all parties to support the work of the Special Envoy and continue to play a constructive role in the situation in Yemen.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, for his briefing. We take this opportunity to assure him of our full support in the work ahead. We also thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock for his informative briefing.

Regrettably, we face a disheartening situation in Yemen. Once again, we deplore the fact that, in spite of the Security Council's repeated calls for the parties to resume political dialogue and end the severe humanitarian crisis plaguing the country — described by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock as the worst humanitarian crisis — we continue to witness an increase in the number of armed clashes. Violence has escalated in the governorates of Al-Hudaydah, Ta'iz, Saad and Al-Jawf, among others. There have been reports of air strikes and armed clashes, which, according to a report issued on 9 April by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, have caused the deaths of at least 41 people in March and April. In addition, ongoing clashes have led to the displacement of more than 85,000 people who have been forced to leave their homes since December last year, thereby increasing the total number of internally displaced persons to more than 2 million people.

Similarly, there are growing reports about the recruitment of children as combatants. According to a report issued by UNICEF on 27 March, since 2015 at least 2,400 children have been recruited as fighters amid threats and promises of financial compensation to their families.

More over, the dire humanitarian crisis must contend not only the problem of food insecurity, which has put 8.4 million people at risk of famine and 60 per cent of the population at risk of food insecurity, but also the cholera outbreak that has affected nearly 1.1 million people in 22 of the 23 governorates of Yemen and caused more than 2,200 deaths since its outbreak in April 2017. Unfortunately, that situation is exacerbated by the dangerous diphtheria outbreak, which, according to a 17 March report published by the World Health Organization, has recorded more than 1,300 infected people and 76 confirmed deaths so far this year.

Against that backdrop, my delegation reiterates once again its call for the Council to maintain a unanimous and firm position on condemning the belligerent acts and campaigns that aggravate the crisis in Yemen and recklessly threaten the lives of 27 million innocent people. We must also be consistent in categorically condemning and rejecting any indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, including, of course, missile launches and air strikes, as such acts constitute flagrant violations of international law.

Likewise, our voice must be clear and determined in calling on all parties to guarantee the full and continuous operation of all ports, airports and access routes, especially the Al-Hudaydah and Saleef ports and the Sana'a airport, since they are lifelines for the population's survival. We also call on the parties to comply with the presidential statements adopted on 15 March (S/PRST/2018/5) and 15 June 2017 (S/PRST/2017/7) and to definitively implement the provisions of resolution 2216 (2015).

To that end, the parties must abandon any preconditions to engaging in dialogue, cease hostilities immediately and commit to taking up negotiations, which would enable an inclusive and orderly political transition in line with the demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people within the framework of respect for

the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Yemen.

In that vein, we recall the words of the Secretary-General on 13 April, when he stated in this Chamber that

> "There is only one pathway to ending the Yemeni conflict and to addressing the humanitarian crisis: a negotiated political settlement through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue." (*S/PV.8231, p. 2*)

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Yemen. My delegation would also like to take the opportunity of the first briefing delivered by Mr. Martin Griffiths, the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, to congratulate him on his appointment and wish him every success in the discharge of his duties.

Three years after the outbreak of the conflict in Yemen, my delegation remains particularly concerned about the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation, which has been described by the United Nations as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Indeed, the statistics are particularly alarming, with nearly 10,000 human lives lost, 3 million displaced and more than 24 million people suffering from malnutrition, including 2.4 million children, not to mention the threat of famine and the devastation caused by the cholera epidemic affecting the population.

In view of the gravity of the situation, Côte d'Ivoire appeals for international solidarity. In that regard, it welcomes the donors' conference held in Geneva on 3 April, which resulted in more than $2 billion in pledges under Yemen's humanitarian response plan. My country thanks all donors for that outpouring of solidarity, and especially welcomes the commitment by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to raise an additional $500 million from donors in the region.

Despite our joint efforts, the humanitarian situation in Yemen will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a viable political prospect. My delegation deplores the current political impasse and calls for a peaceful settlement of the conflict through an inclusive political process involving all Yemeni stakeholders. It urges the international community, faced with the confirmed risk of destabilizing the entire region, to invest more in the pursuit of a peaceful solution to the crisis, which has gone on too long.

My country believes that the international community's political efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis will be completely futile if they are not accompanied by significant progress on the ground. The implementation of a comprehensive ceasefire and the resumption of political negotiations for lasting peace, under the auspices of the United Nations, are today the only way out of the crisis to which the entire international community must commit. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the efforts of the United Nations to give new impetus to the peace talks and political dialogue. It especially welcomes the recent visits of the new Special Envoy to Riyadh and Sana'a, as part of the consultations with the Yemeni parties, which are encouraging signs of a renewed political process.

In conclusion, my delegation reaffirms its commitment to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen. It calls on the parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement to the crisis.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, for his maiden briefing. We congratulate him on his appointment and express our support to him as he embarks on his heavy responsibilities of facilitating a diplomatic solution for the Yemeni crisis. We find it encouraging that he has already started engaging with the parties and building the necessary cooperative relationships that will be imperative in the revitalization of the political process. Listening to the views of the Yemenis themselves is indeed absolutely important. We recognize that the crisis in Yemen requires a high sense of urgency, but we also believe that support, understanding and patience from all parties, including the Council, are needed so that the new Special Envoy can formulate a comprehensive way forward that will be effective in ending the conflict. The Special Envoy also emphasized that point in his briefing, and we look forward to the new framework for negotiation, which he plans to present in the coming two months.

We also thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing, and we reiterate our appreciation to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for their continued selfless service to provide aid under difficult conditions.

As the war enters its fourth year, we remain deeply concerned by the multifaceted and complex crisis in Yemen, which continues to have a devastating impact on civilians. In that regard, we thank the United Nations and the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland for hosting a high-level pledging event in Geneva on 3 April. We also thank all donors for pledging to provide more than $2 billion. We hope that the funds pledged will be disbursed rapidly to finance the Yemen 2018 humanitarian response plan. As mentioned by the Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock during the event, in addition to the financial aspect, the success of the plan to reach all Yemenis in need of aid requires safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access.

We are still of the belief that the only solution to the Yemeni crisis is a peaceful and inclusive Yemeni-led political process that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people, in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We also believe that the concerns of countries in the region need to be addressed. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the presidential statement adopted on 15 March (S/PRST/2018/5) and the 28 March press statement (SC/13270), which enabled the Council to speak with one voice, underscoring, inter alia, the need for all parties to return to dialogue as the only means of delivering a negotiated political settlement. We call on all parties to fully implement them and engage constructively with Special Envoy Griffiths in the resumption of political dialogue and agreement on the cessation of hostilities. They should seize the appointment of the new Special Envoy as an opportunity and demonstrate the necessary political will to work with him towards reaching a deal, which today he said is possible, and bring an end to the war.

Finally, we believe that the international solidarity demonstrated during the pledging event should also be repeated to find a durable political solution to end the worst humanitarian tragedy of our time. We cannot agree more with what the Special Envoy said with respect to the strategic importance of ending the crisis in Yemen, not only for the sake of Yemenis themselves, who have endured so much over the past four years, but also for the sake of peace and stability in the region and, indeed, the world.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would first like to congratulate Mr. Martin Griffiths on his recent appointment as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and to thank him for his excellent, clear and informative briefing. Although his briefing was only preliminary, as he indicated, we found it very detailed and comprehensive. We wish him every success in the work that the Secretary-General entrusted to him in Yemen, and we fully support him and his entire team in carrying out their work. We would also like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his detailed and vivid briefing, which, as always, has given us a clear idea of the situation on the ground. Our thanks also go to Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Mr. Griffiths's predecessor as Special Envoy, who during nearly three years in that role did his utmost to find a viable solution to the conflict in Yemen. We wish him every success with his new responsibilities.

I will touch on three aspects of this issue that will somewhat echo the views of our friends from the Dutch delegation.

First, concerning the attacks on Saudi Arabia, Equatorial Guinea firmly condemns the ballistic-missile attacks allegedly launched on 25 March by Houthis at the Saudi Arabian cities of Riyadh, Khamis Mushait, Najran and Jizan. They endangered civilian areas and caused a number of fatalities. The growing number of such incidents, which was the bad news that Mr. Griffiths gave us this morning, shows that those weapons have fallen into the hands of non-State actors in violation of the arms embargo imposed on Yemen in accordance with resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2402 (2018). We therefore call on Council members to take a united position condemning those attacks and, where appropriate, to identify and sanction anyone who has helped to violate the relevant Security Council resolutions on the arms embargo, so as to prevent any further escalation of this unending and troubling conflict, which has resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis that Yemen has ever known, and especially now that actors are trying to harm populations well beyond their national borders.

Secondly, we are very concerned about the impasse in the political situation in Yemen. The military conflict persists, the political process has failed to yield satisfactory results and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. It is therefore important that the parties involved in the Yemeni crisis understand that a political process involving direct, sincere and inclusive dialogue is the only way to arrive at a lasting solution to

this grave situation. The warring parties in Yemen must support the efforts of the United Nations based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In that regard, Special Envoy Griffiths told us this morning that the good news is that a political solution is within reach, and that it can be achieved through the establishment of a transitional, inclusive Government and dialogue. But for that to happen, as he pointed out, above all, the terrible war in Yemen must end.

Thirdly, concerning the humanitarian aspect of the situation, Equatorial Guinea joins other Council members in echoing Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock's message with regard to the need to honour funding pledges as soon as possible in order to provide the 22 million people in need of assistance — according to information from Mr. John Ging, Director of the Coordination and Response Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — with aid to end the food insecurity from which they are suffering and thereby also tackle the disastrous situation that these conflicts have produced. The humanitarian problems of cholera and the risk of famine are still worrying, and it is important to ensure that the international community continues to be ready to help those most in need. For that, it is essential that humanitarian actors be given free access to the affected areas.

In conclusion, we hope that the Geneva conference will lead to the disbursement of the $2 billion pledged to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lowcock for their briefings. We would like to express our support for Mr. Griffiths, who has just begun his work and is conducting it appropriately. We hope that with the support of the Security Council and all stakeholders he can succeed in overcoming the impasse in this protracted crisis. We will support him in his efforts.

We have been closely following the military, political and humanitarian developments in Yemen. We are seriously concerned about the fact that as a result of the ongoing hostilities, the numbers of dead and wounded are increasing, as is the extent of the damage to civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities. So far, unfortunately, the escalating trend in the conflict is only increasing, and the humanitarian disaster is getting worse. More than 80 per cent of the population of Yemen is in need of assistance. Millions of Yemenis are starving. The country has been swamped by an epidemic of cholera and diphtheria. We greatly appreciate the efforts of all who are taking steps to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people and welcome the outcome of the pledging conference held in Geneva on 3 April and the pledges that were announced there, especially by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Russia is also providing assistance to the Yemeni people both through Aden and Sana'a. Since the acute stage of the conflict began in 2015, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations has delivered planeloads bringing a total of more than 70 tons of various humanitarian goods to Yemen. We are working both bilaterally and through the World Food Programme. Nevertheless, we believe that humanitarian assistance alone cannot result in viable, long-term solutions. We continue to believe that the only way to end this protracted civil conflict is through dialogue that takes into consideration the interests of all the participants.

We emphatically condemn indiscriminate strikes, of which civilians are usually the victims. Targeting civilian areas of Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles is also absolutely unacceptable. We urge the perpetrators to halt such efforts, which do not help the political process or an eventual political settlement in any way. We reaffirm our principled position in favour of an immediate halt to the armed confrontation in the Republic of Yemen and to the use of force and attempts to settle their differences militarily by the parties to the conflict. That can be achieved only by focusing on Yemen itself, not by introducing geopolitical calculations into the conflict. Through desire and political will, Yemen can become an example of a successful settlement to other conflicts in the region and a factor contributing to regional stability, which the area so desperately needs.

We hope that Mr. Griffiths can succeed in reversing those trends. We believe that the international community, and first and foremost the United Nations, to which we traditionally assign a central role, should continue their efforts to induce Yemeni stakeholders to reject violence and sit down at the negotiating table to create a consolidated vision for the country's next incarnation, on the basis of a broad national dialogue and mutual consideration of the interests of its main political forces, as well as the relevant decisions of the international community. Rather than ostracizing

anyone, it is important to involve all the countries and forces that can bring genuine influence to bear on the parties to the conflict.

For our part, we intend to continue to contribute to those efforts. We have been doing so since the start of the civil conflict in Yemen, and have been in regular communication with everyone who is crucial to putting the situation in Yemen back on a path to peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We would particularly like to thank Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Lowcock for their important and detailed briefings.

Peru fully supports the dialogue initiated by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General with all the parties to the Yemeni conflict, and would like to emphasize his assessment that there is a real possibility for a political solution if we act inclusively, pragmatically, swiftly, even-handedly and with restraint. We believe that because they are so closely linked, the political and humanitarian aspects of the Yemeni conflict must be addressed simultaneously and with the utmost urgency. We therefore express our deep concern about the escalation of hostilities, which is exacerbating the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today.

We note with alarm that various actors involved in the conflict continue to violate international law, international humanitarian law and human rights. These crimes must be duly investigated and those responsible prosecuted and punished. In that regard, we condemn the firing of missiles at Saudi Arabia, since targeting urban centres is a war crime. We also stress that any military response must respect the principles of proportionality, legality and precaution.

We regret the fact that trade in essential goods and humanitarian access continue to be restricted. That is notwithstanding the important presidential statement that the Council adopted in March (S/PRST/2018/5), with concrete commitments aimed at alleviating the suffering of the Yemeni people, and the generous contributions announced for the humanitarian response plan. As Mr. Lowcock pointed out, all ports, including Hudaydah and Saleef ports and Sana'a's airport, must be kept open. The airport is particularly important for bringing in medical supplies and for emergency humanitarian evacuations. Safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian workers must also be ensured.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Yemen, and to point out that my delegation will continue to work in its capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) to end the suffering of the civilian population and to build sustainable peace in that country.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alyemany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on Peru's assumption of the presidency of the Council this month, and to wish you every success. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Council, and I would also like to sincerely thank the Secretary-General for his direct engagement in the quest for a settlement of the situation in Yemen. I commend the direct role that he has played in guaranteeing the success of the conference held in Geneva at the beginning of this month in order to finance the United Nations plan to meet the humanitarian needs in Yemen.

I also thank Mr. Martin Griffiths, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for his first briefing to the Council, as he begins his efforts to resolve the now nearly four-year-long crisis in Yemen. The crisis resulted from a coup led by Houthi militias against the legitimate Government in Yemen, which at the time was leading a transition in line with the noble and legitimate aspirations of the entire Yemeni people of all political stripes, under the auspices of the United Nations and the Council. My Government supports the efforts of Mr. Griffiths. He can count on our collaborative, constructive and flexible cooperation in the efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Yemen and to put an end to the current chaos and the war that the Houthis launched against our people in September 2014.

There are specific terms of reference for a settlement in Yemen, unlike some other crises in the world, and, as the Special Envoy said, they are clear. Through their allies and friends, the Houthi Iranian militias have tried to undermine those terms of reference. They thought they had seized power that they would never let go. They thought they could attack the Yemeni people and our neighbours and use the chaos and violence to impose Iran's expansionist agenda. Any acceptance of those Houthi militias as the guarantors of security in Yemen and stability in the region is a clear example of

the politics of despair. Neither Yemen nor any country represented here can accept the possibility that our political life might be managed by an armed militia that, like the terrorist militia Hizbullah, is supported financially and logistically by another country.

That is why the Yemeni Government has always expressed its readiness to cooperate with the Special Envoy, in accordance with the terms of reference agreed on by the Yemeni people and with the legal backing of the international community. That includes the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and implementation mechanism; the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference sponsored by the United Nations in 2013, resulting in a reconciliatory document that reflected the aspirations of Yemeni society; and, lastly, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, particularly resolution 2216 (2015), which constitutes the main basis for a resolution of the crisis in Yemen and shows that the Security Council understands the essence of the problem in Yemen. This solution remains the only way to establish lasting peace in the country.

We met in Kuwait in the first half of 2016. At the time, the Yemeni Government was genuinely ready to implement resolution 2216 (2015). We demonstrated a spirit of conciliation and signed accords aimed at reaching an eventual comprehensive political agreement. However the Houthis were not willing to sign the accords, as Mr. Ould Sheikh Ahmed said during his most recent briefing of the Council in February (see S/PV.8191). Previously, we had met in Biel, Switzerland. Back then, the Yemeni Government called for the adoption of confidence-building measures, but the Houthis rejected them. Those measures are again in the spotlight.

Today, as has been said, the ports, the airports, salaries and the release of prisoners are all priority issues. If the perpetrators of the coup were aware of the gravity of the humanitarian situation which they caused for Yemen and its people, then we could work together under the auspices of the Special Envoy to discuss many issues, some of which were already discussed in Biel, such as the release of all prisoners and taking immediate action to improve the humanitarian situation by lifting restrictions on humanitarian access and ending attacks on humanitarian workers so as to allow them safe and unimpeded access to all areas. Other issues that we discussed in Biel could also be discussed. Those include steps towards economic recovery to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people, help the central bank to stabilize the Yemeni riyal, pay salaries, improve the financial, economic and investment situation and facilitate food imports. That is our focus today.

The Yemeni Government welcomes the proposal made by Martin Griffiths during his meeting with the President last week to open Sana'a airport for humanitarian cases. He called for the opening of the airport under the supervision of the United Nations and for the withdrawal of the militias from it. That issue has been brought up previously by the Government. However, we still believe that the situation cannot be normalized without an end to the coup and the restoration of State institutions.

The Security Council has shown unity since the beginning of the Yemeni crisis in 2011. We call on the Council and on Mr. Martin Griffiths to focus above all on the Houthis' compliance with the Security Council resolutions. The Houthis must not benefit from their crimes against humanity. That would only embolden other militias around the world and lead to the spread of terrorism and chaos. In order to achieve peace in Yemen, the Houthi militias must first withdraw from the cities and the State institutions that they have occupied and pillaged. They must return the weaponry that they stole from the military and State security institutions, as well as and especially the ballistic missiles that were provided to them by Iran. They must end their aggression against the territories of Saudi Arabia and stop carrying out the functions of the State. They must stop committing one of the gravest violations of international law, namely, the recruitment of children. That is the only way to ensure lasting peace.

The Iranian regime continues its flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Yemen and other countries of the region. The Yemeni Government and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition have sent a number of letters to the Security Council and the Secretary-General with regard to the attacks by Iranian-made ballistic missiles. Some 119 missiles have been launched by the Houthi militias against Saudi Arabia to date. That is clear proof that Iran is a State that sponsors terrorism and seeks to destabilize all the countries of the region.

On 11 April, the Yemeni Government also issued a statement concerning the Iranian Embassy in Sana'a, which continues to operate. Today it functions as a command centre for the Iranian regime to hold meetings between Iranian military experts and the coup forces. That is happening despite the fact that the Yemeni

Government and Iran ceased diplomatic relations on 2 October 2015, and despite the letter sent by the Yemeni Government on 6 January 2016, after having verified that Iran had not closed its Embassy in Yemen. In that letter, the Yemeni Government informed the Iranian regime that it had not complied with the decision to end relations between the two Governments. We gave the Iranian regime 72 hours to leave Yemen. However, despite all those communications, the terrorist Iranian elements of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps continue to use the Embassy to cover up their military and training activities in order to support the Houthis in clear violation of international law.

The Security Council has failed to put pressure on Iran to end its interference in Yemeni affairs and its threat to regional security and stability. It has failed to compel Iran to stop smuggling missiles and threatening international navigation south of the Red Sea and Bab Al-Mandab.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate into a humanitarian crisis unprecedented in the twenty-first century. The areas of Yemen controlled by the Houthis have been systematically destroyed, which has led to horrific levels of humanitarian suffering. Today, as we discuss international efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, we commend the outcome of the Geneva conference convened on 3 April by the Secretary-General, together with Switzerland and Sweden. At the conference, $2.1 billion was pledged for the humanitarian response plan for Yemen for 2018, which will require $3 billion. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Switzerland and Sweden for organizing the conference. I would also like to thank Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, as well as all the other countries that made generous contributions to assist the Yemeni people.

I cannot but commend the efforts of Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, to transform the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and to improve the performance of the humanitarian agencies in Yemen and all the relevant parties in order to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Yemen. The Yemeni Government has sent letters to the Secretary-General regarding the obstacles facing humanitarian workers created by the Houthi militias. The letters describe the looting of humanitarian assistance. The latest such letter was sent from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Secretary-General regarding the complaint by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations to the assistant of the Under-Secretary-General about the blackmailing and attacks by the Houthis against United Nations staff.

The Houthi militias are taking advantage of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen as an excuse to portray themselves as victims. Yesterday, I met the Special Envoy. We talked about the garbage accumulating in the streets of Sana'a, which could lead to another cholera outbreak. It seems that this practice is being undertaken systematically in order to unleash an outbreak of cholera. We hold the Houthis accountable for that. As the Under-Secretary-General said, another outbreak of cholera in Yemen would pose yet another challenge for the international community.

I have warned more than once against focusing on the humanitarian aspect of the situation in Yemen in the absence of a political solution and the failure of the international community to pressure the Houthis to come to the negotiating table and to implement the provisions of resolution 2216 (2015). Following the success of the Geneva conference, we cannot expect the international community to continue to provide such generous contributions in the coming years in the absence of a political resolution. I call on the Council to put pressure on the coup party, which continues to reject the peace initiatives. It must be criminalized before the world.

In conclusion, the Yemeni people beseech the members of the Council to stand by them at this critical historic moment, as has been their hope since the beginning of the political crisis in Yemen in 2011. The Yemeni people will never forget the noble positions that Council members have taken on ending the war and the coup, with a view to enabling Yemen to become a new democratic and federal State that can embrace all its people, provide assistance on the humanitarian front and work towards regional and international stability and security.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8236

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8236th meeting
Tuesday, 17 April 2018, 4.50 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 4.50 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), the Secretary-General has on many occasions called for its full implementation. However, rather than implement the resolution of the Council, we have seen parties to the conflict sustain intense military activity at an enormous human cost. Today, we have been asked to provide an update on the humanitarian situation in Raqqa and Rukban. We have also been asked to cover humanitarian issues in Syria at large, in particular in Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin.

Let me start with Raqqa city and Rukban. The population of those two places total only about 1 per cent of the number of Syrians in need of humanitarian help, but their needs are no less important than those of the 99 per cent of their compatriots needing assistance in other parts of the country.

On 1 April, the United Nations undertook an assessment mission to Raqqa. Since the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant was forced out of Raqqa in October, nearly 100,000 people have returned to Raqqa city. However, conditions are not conducive to returns, due to the high levels of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device contamination, widespread and severe infrastructural damage, and a lack of basic services. More than 50 casualties of remnants of war have been reported every week. With the onset of spring, we are concerned that children playing outside will be particularly vulnerable. An estimated 70 to 80 per cent of all buildings inside Raqqa city have been destroyed or damaged.

While public services are slowly resuming — with at least 37 bakeries operating, for example — the city lacks electricity and mobile communications, and water is being pumped at only a very limited capacity to the outskirts of the city. As many as 95 per cent of households that have returned to Raqqa are food insecure. Health services are lacking or severely limited. Some schools have reopened, although they are lacking school materials and other supplies. Following the 1 April assessment, United Nations agencies are planning deliveries of humanitarian assistance and programmatic interventions. This response will support the ongoing activities of the humanitarian organizations already active inside Raqqa that are providing food, health care and other basic services. It will also complement the ongoing response for those displaced and in need across north-eastern Syria, where nearly 900,000 people are receiving assistance each month.

In Rukban, some 50,000 people continue to be in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. Water and basic health care are being provided from Jordan, but there is a pressing need for better service provision and, in some cases, for referrals elsewhere for medical help. People in that area last received assistance, delivered from Jordan, in early January. Approval for a United Nations inter-agency convoy from Damascus to Rukban was received from the Government of Syria on 18 March. Humanitarian agencies are working closely with the United States, the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to make this delivery possible, noting the importance of finalizing arrangements for the safety of the operation, since the current security guarantees permit movement only to an area some 10 kilometres outside Rukban. Discussions continue on how aid can be best delivered, providing safe delivery of life-saving help to those in need.

The town of Douma and other areas in eastern Ghouta are now under the control of the Government of Syria. After years of deprivation under siege, those who remain in the area still require urgent assistance that we, as the humanitarian community, have yet to be able to provide. Access to reach people throughout eastern Ghouta is critical. The United Nations and partners are responding to the mounting humanitarian needs of the 155,000 people displaced from eastern Ghouta with food, shelter, health care and other assistance and protection services.

However, for those in the overcrowded sites for internally displaced persons around eastern Ghouta, as well as for those who left on buses for Idlib and Aleppo governorates, the situation is precarious. Of the 155,000 who have been displaced, about 63,000 have moved north to Idlib and Aleppo, joining the nearly 400,000 people who have been displaced from southern Idlib since 15 December. As a result, there has been a 25 per cent increase in Idlib's displaced population, with 1.2 million of the governorate's 2 million people now displaced, many of them multiple times. This extreme situation puts incredible pressure on the host communities and the humanitarian actors working cross-border to provide assistance and services. Fighting among non-State armed opposition groups in Idlib is further complicating the situation for those in need in the area. Those remaining in Afrin, as well as the 137,000 people who were displaced to Government-controlled Tell Rifaat and the surrounding areas, are also in dire need of humanitarian aid and must be granted freedom of movement. This includes those who need medical evacuation from Tell Rifaat to nearby Aleppo.

Between 2 and 4 April, several Turkish-facilitated United Nations cross-border shipments consisting of food supplies, health and other relief items were sent to assist people in need in Afrin district. On 25 March, the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered assistance to 50,000 people in need in Tell Rifaat. Overall, while these are positive developments, humanitarian partners are still struggling to gain sustained access to Afrin, and freedom of movement for internally displaced persons remains very limited. On 25 March the United Nations also submitted a request to the Syrian authorities for the deployment of an inter-agency surge team to scale up the United Nations operational capacity in Syria. Response to a request for an additional 17 United Nations staff to be deployed for a four-week period was received on 11 April, authorizing the deployment of 12 United Nations staff.

As we approach the conference to be held in Brussels on 24 and 25 April, we have an immediate opportunity to make progress on easing the humanitarian suffering by ensuring that the humanitarian operations are fully funded. With an appeal that is currently less than 15 per cent funded, I cannot overstate the importance of sustaining and scaling up the international response.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his informative briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

Various delegations have been constantly calling on us to report to the Council on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). Let me oblige. In the context of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), Russia, in coordination with the Government of Syria, has undertaken unprecedented efforts to improve the situation in eastern Ghouta, where illegal armed groups, with external support, have held the civilian population hostage for several years. After lengthy and intensive negotiations, those militants who are unreconciled have been evacuated from the area and bloodshed has been prevented. The process of returning the evacuated population is under way, and some 60,000 people have already returned.

On the whole, the situation in eastern Ghouta is stable. In order to maintain law and order, prevent provocations, protect civilians and provide them with humanitarian and medical aid, joint efforts have been organized between Russian military-police units and Syrian law-enforcement bodies. Issues related to the restoration of infrastructure in the towns of eastern Ghouta are being discussed. Rubble is being cleared in Douma with the help of construction equipment provided by Russia. Water and electricity supplies are being re-established. Daily bread deliveries have started. Rebuilding eastern Ghouta will require focused cooperation on the part of the international community, including through the United Nations and its specialized agencies. We call on our colleagues to join these efforts.

However, the situation in Raqqa is disastrous. The coalition expelled the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant more than six months ago and has occupied the territory since then, practically speaking. It has done nothing to restore the city, which was destroyed by aerial bombing. People are returning at their own peril and risk and are frequently being blown up by mines and improvised explosive devices.

Nobody really knew what was going on in Raqqa. Until very recently, no efforts had been made even to have the United Nations assess the population's humanitarian needs. Only recently, thanks to our persistent pressure, has one such mission, albeit a very short one, taken place. Even in the space of a

few hours, however, the specialists were able to see with their own eyes that Raqqa lies in ruins. There is literally not a single whole building standing. There are still piles of bodies under the rubble. People are being blown up by mines every day. There is no electricity, water or basic social services. Not a single school or hospital is functioning. The so-called local council, contrary to the coalition's assurances, began work only this month, and it has become clear, and not just to us, that they are totally incompetent. Where did they get these impostors? Whom do they represent? How can they be entrusted with people's lives and safety? As we understand it, there have already been several protests against the American occupation, which has done the residents no good. The only effective way out of the situation in Raqqa will be to restore the functioning of Government structures there.

Another grey area is the Rukban displaced persons camp, which is near the United States military base at Al-Tanf. It is important to say once again that the mere fact of its existence is a gross violation of Syrian sovereignty. It is a continuing cause of concern for Syria's neighbours in Jordan. The coalition forces blocked access to the area for a long period of time, and it took a great deal of effort to get them to issue an official permit with security guarantees. The Syrian authorities gave the green light immediately after that, but so far we have seen no practical steps to provide humanitarian assistance.

The situation in Raqqa and Rukban should be constantly monitored by United Nations humanitarian personnel. It is vital that sustainable access be provided to them. Now we have a question for the coalition countries. What are they doing to implement resolution 2401 (2018)? What are they doing to ease the situation in Raqqa, Rukban and besieged Fo'ah and Kafraya? And they need not bother taking the discussion to a so-called broader format. They should have the courage to answer our questions and not try to change the subject.

However, I do now have a few words to say in a broader context. We have been quite startled by the hypocritical behaviour of the United States, Britain and France in the past few days. Less than a day after the missile attacks, their organizers started coming up with peculiar political initiatives, despite the fact that every element in their proposals was already present in the existing relevant resolutions, which simply had to be implemented. Through their act of aggression, the troika of the United States, Britain and France and those who supported or welcomed their actions declared their solidarity with one party to the conflict. An aggressor does not have the moral right to create international legal documents regarding the victim of that aggression. Russia is working with every side in the Syrian conflict. Our position has always been based on the importance of implementing resolution 2254 (2015) and returning to the Geneva talks, without preconditions, and above all without making them conditional on so-called regime change.

Before the missile attacks, we could see that the Syrian Government was ready to hold talks in Geneva. Now those efforts have suffered a major setback. It is hard to imagine that after all that has happened, the Syrian authorities are enthusiastic about talking about a political settlement in their country on the Western troika's orders. If the aim is to bomb the President of Syria into sitting down at the negotiating table, present that as a victory over him — because according to them he understands only force — and through those negotiations to remove him and put him on trial as a so-called war criminal — as Washington, London and Paris have directly threatened — then the aim is unachievable. They should have no illusions. First they have to repair the damage that they themselves have done to the prospects for a political settlement.

However, the Western capitals are encouraging bellicose pronouncements by the radical opposition, which has set up Al-Assad's departure as a precondition for its participation in the Geneva consultations, and now, inspired by the 14 April missile strikes, is demanding that the coalition start a war with Damascus in direct repudiation of the principles of resolution 2254 (2015). What is needed is for the so-called Riyadh opposition to abandon its destructive position and begin to implement the Security Council resolution, which it has already drifted far away from. And their sponsors should also drop their belligerent rhetoric about the lawfully elected President of Syria, since they themselves insist on the importance of rejecting preconditions.

The idea of creating a mechanism to establish who is responsible for the use of chemical weapons no longer makes any sense when Washington and its allies have already identified the perpetrators and, essentially, appointed themselves their executioners.

Apparently the impression has been created that — encouraged by the Western troika's oh-so-encouraging air strikes and the new lot of sanctions

that Washington has promised us — Russia will have to change its position. It is time that the West understood that this logic has never worked in the past with regard to Russia and will not work in the future either. The British and French delegations hastened to set up plans for Syria a few days ago. We too have a plan. We do not claim it to be exhaustive, but permit me to acquaint the Council with it.

First, there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. We are all familiar with the political basis for a settlement. We must work together to implement resolution 2254 (2015), which the negotiations in the framework of the Astana process and the results of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi are designed to assist. We urge the United States and its allies to end their aggressive actions and threats to use force against the sovereign State of Syria, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. They serve only to make the prospects for peace more distant.

Secondly, we urge them to halt all efforts to create new realities in Syria, undermining its sovereignty and territorial integrity, working to maintain the foreign occupation of parts of Syria and its further division, plundering natural resources and inciting hostility between various sectors of the country's population.

Thirdly, we urge all States and Syrian opposition groups to cease their aggressive and hateful rhetoric directed at Syria's legitimate authorities and at Russia, and to stop taking steps intended to bring about a violent overthrow of power.

Fourthly, we call on States that wield corresponding influence to work to finally and irrevocably separate the armed groups from terrorists and to embark on genuine international cooperation in combating terrorism, without double standards.

Fifthly, we urge the international community to join the efforts to bring Syria humanitarian assistance without delay and to reject any manipulation of the issue for political purposes.

Lastly, we call on opposition entities to immediately abandon any incitements to external aggression through provocations using chemical weapons, and on their Western sponsors not to exploit such provocations.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing today. The Security Council has been preoccupied, especially of late, with the situation in Syria, which has seen dangerous and accelerating developments. That is why we need to address all these developments in an appropriate manner and further our efforts to reach a comprehensive political solution to the crisis in Syria.

Resolution 2401 (2018), adopted unanimously by the Council less than two months ago, addressed the humanitarian situation across Syria. The resolution demanded a cessation of hostilities for at least 30 days without delay in order to allow the United Nations and its partners to deliver humanitarian assistance and ensure the evacuation of the sick and wounded, in accordance with international law. We underscore once again the Council's demand in resolution 2401 (2018) for unhindered and sustained access for humanitarian convoys, including medical material. We remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and we call for an immediate end to all attacks on civilians, residential areas and medical facilities, in accordance with the resolution.

We are deeply frustrated by the failure of compliance with resolution 2401 (2018). We call on the parties with influence to work with the Syrian authorities in particular and to urge them to implement resolution 2401 (2018), pursuant to international humanitarian law. We expect the guarantor countries of Astana agreement — Russia, Iran and Turkey — to ensure progress on that front, in accordance with the declaration issued by the tripartite summit held in Istanbul on 4 April.

We agree with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Sweden regarding our concern over the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta and Idlib, in northern Aleppo. We also express our concern at the increasing obstacles facing the United Nations and its efforts to reach civilians who had fled eastern Ghouta. We call on the Syrian Government to facilitate the access of United Nations staff to camps for internally displaced persons.

Regarding Raqqa, we thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his update today following the recent humanitarian assessment visit. We welcome the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to prepare the necessary humanitarian plans in order to provide assistance to

Raqqa and remove all mines and explosive devices, which pose a threat to the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Concerning the situation in Rukban, we stress the need to ensure sustained humanitarian access to camps in the area from inside Syria. We urge the United Nations and its partners to deliver this assistance as soon as possible.

In closing, we urge Member States to participate actively in the donor conference on the humanitarian situation in Syria which will be held in Brussels next week, given the conference's important role in alleviating the situation of the Syrian people, whose suffering is now in its eighth year, with no serious settlement in view.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for the second time today for his update on the humanitarian situation in Syria. His briefing serves to remind us — if a reminder were needed — of the scale of the humanitarian crisis facing Syria and the humanitarian community. Over 12 million people, half of Syria's population, are now displaced inside and outside the country. The 700,000 people who fled their homes since just the beginning of this year as a result of the unremitting and horrific violence join this mass of humankind seeking shelter and protection.

Resolution 2401 (2018), unanimously adopted on 24 February, sought to provide relief for those inside Syria by ensuring a durable humanitarian pause in the conflict. We deplore the lack of implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) to date. It is imperative that we all increase our efforts to ensure its full and immediate implementation across Syria. In that regard, the Astana guarantors must live up to their commitments, as articulated in the joint statement by their Presidents on 4 April.

We reiterate the Council's demand in resolution 2401 (2018) for unimpeded and sustained access for weekly humanitarian convoys — I repeat, weekly humanitarian convoys — including with medical items. We remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and call for an immediate end to all attacks on civilians, civilian objects and medical facilities, as demanded in resolution 2401 (2018).

We are gravely concerned for the civilians remaining in Douma, who have been subject to intensive violence, leading to the deaths of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. We call on the Syrian authorities to grant facilitation letters for humanitarian convoys to Douma immediately.

We are also concerned about the increased obstacles facing the United Nations in gaining access to civilians who have fled eastern Ghouta. We call on the Syrian authorities to immediately facilitate sustained access for United Nations personnel to internally displaced persons' camps. In addition, the Syrian authorities must immediately grant the visa requests for staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as part of the much-needed humanitarian surge currently under way.

We reiterate that any evacuation, from eastern Ghouta or elsewhere, must be voluntary and in line with international law. Those who decide to leave should do so to a safe place of their choice, and with the right to return. An increased United Nations presence is vital to respond to the needs, not least the protection needs, of both those remaining in eastern Ghouta and for those arriving at reception sites.

Turning to Raqqa, we thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his timely update, which comes following the recent humanitarian assessment mission. We welcome the planning now under way for assistance to these areas. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) represent a hidden and deadly threat to the people returning to Raqqa. We are deeply troubled by the high number of victims of these devices cited in latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/243). The clearing of mines and IEDs will be essential for the safe return of internally displaced persons and the rehabilitation of communities. We call on all to contribute to the implementation of this provision of resolution 2401 (2018).

We are gravely concerned about the situation of civilians in Rukban, many of whom are women and children. Sustained humanitarian access is essential, as is the need to find longer-term and durable solutions to the situation there. We call on the United Nations and its partners to undertake the planned humanitarian delivery to Rukban as soon as possible.

The humanitarian situation in Idlib is also extremely worrying, given the rapid increase in internally displaced persons fleeing to the governorate

and months of attacks on health-care facilities. The cross-border deliveries of humanitarian aid continue to constitute a lifeline for Syrians in acute need in Idlib.

We are also concerned about the situation of the almost 140,000 people displaced from Afrin. We welcome the scaled-up humanitarian response, including deliveries to areas hosting internally displaced persons. We call on the Syrian authorities to ensure freedom of movement for internally displaced persons to access medical services, and on Turkey to enable the safe, voluntary and dignified return of those who have been forced to flee.

The scale of the crisis in Syria and the humanitarian response needed remains immense. The humanitarian community is undertaking a herculean task, and we commend all those working in extremely challenging conditions. We must stand with them and the people of Syria. In that regard, we are deeply troubled by the acute lack of financing for United Nations humanitarian operations in Syria. We call on all Member States to make substantial commitments at the Brussels conference next week and to disburse those pledges as early as possible. Sweden can be counted upon to continue contributing generously to the humanitarian response in Syria.

Finally, let me reiterate what has been said in this Chamber numerous times before, as it deserves to be repeated: the only sustainable way to solve the humanitarian crisis in Syria is through a political solution to the conflict. At this critical time, we must seek to revitalize the United Nations-led political process, try to put our differences aside and shoulder the responsibility entrusted to the Council.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock once again for his briefing. As always, he informs us and puts the gravity of Syria's humanitarian situation in perspective.

First, given all of the interesting accusations we heard earlier, I want to make a few points crystal clear. The 75 members of the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) joined forces to liberate people from ISIS control in Iraq, and the Coalition continues our campaign to eradicate ISIS in Syria. Despite the difficulty of the task, our operations have succeeded in rolling back the so-called ISIS caliphate and addressing a dire threat to our collective peace and security.

The Coalition made those gains while the Al-Assad regime and its backers focused their guns mostly on the Syrian opposition groups that were not ISIS terrorists. While we went after ISIS and actually achieved lasting gains for the Syrian people, the Al-Assad regime was busy bombarding civilians in places like Aleppo, Idlib and eastern Ghouta. The Coalition's operations were carried out in scrupulous regard for the laws of war and to minimize civilian casualties. In Raqqa, our partners conducted a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood evacuation of civilians ISIS had trapped in the city.

The United States will once again put on the record that United Nations humanitarian convoys are welcome at any time in Raqqa or Rukban. We welcome that assistance and are ready to do everything that we can to assist it. As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock noted, a United Nations inter-agency team successfully carried out an assessment in Raqqa just two weeks ago. In Rukban, Coalition forces are also acting to support humanitarian efforts and have worked with the United Nations and other partners to provide requested details on operational security and medical evacuations. The bottom line is that the United States is ready to support humanitarian deliveries. The delay, as always, continues to be whether the Al-Assad regime will grant permission for United Nations convoys to move.

We keep hearing in this Chamber about mine clearance in Raqqa. Removing unexploded ordnance is one of our top priorities when it comes to stabilizing the area: so far we have cleared almost 3,000 explosive remnants of war; we have cleared almost 300 critical infrastructure sites; provided mine risk education for 40,000 people and trained over 120 Syrians to conduct demining operations. This task is not easy, thanks to the quantity of munitions ISIS left behind, but we recognize this work is vital to ensure Syrians can return home safely.

On top of mine clearance in Raqqa, we have provided more than $50 million in food and non-food items to the most vulnerable. For example, we have given close to 300,000 pounds of food and 151 million litres of water to more than 195,000 people. I could go on and talk about the schools and medical clinics we have supported or our efforts to restore electricity. We would be happy to brief our fellow Council members at any time on those details.

The issue is that we are not here to educate ourselves about the work of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS

in Raqqa and our continued efforts to facilitate cross-line delivery into Rukban. Russia has called us here as part of a messaging campaign to try to distract from the atrocities committed by the Al-Assad regime. In order to do that, Russia has asked the Security Council to focus its attention on the one part of Syria where the Al-Assad regime is not pummelling civilians to death with barrel bombs or banned chemical weapons.

Consider what has taken place since the Security Council demanded a ceasefire in resolution 2401 (2018). On 24 February, the Council demanded a halt to the fighting in Syria. Instead, the same day the resolution was adopted, the Al-Assad regime flagrantly disregarded it. The Al-Assad regime and its backers ignored the Council and launched an all-out campaign to seize eastern Ghouta. The campaign culminated in the use of chemical weapons against innocent men, women and children. Over 151,000 civilians were displaced.

Now fighting is escalating in north-western Syria. Between 2 and 17 April, Syrian and Russian air strikes damaged four medical facilities in that part of the country — a disturbing repeat of previous circumstances. Between mid-March and early April, air strikes reportedly killed another 188 civilians and injured 120 others. In addition to a ceasefire, the Council has also called again and again for unhindered humanitarian access in Syria. However, since the beginning of 2018, the Syrian authorities have only allowed six cross-line interagency convoys to deliver humanitarian aid — six. That is just five per cent of the cross-line assistance requested by the United Nations.

More than ever, we need to focus on ensuring that the Council's demand for a ceasefire and for unhindered humanitarian access actually gets implemented on the ground, but that would require the Al-Assad regime to stop its brutal campaign against the Syrian people, and the countries with influence over Al-Assad to join us in demanding that the Al-Assad regime stop is senseless slaughter of the Syrian people.

The United States will not stop focusing on the ways to achieve that goal, no matter how many times our Russian colleagues convene these cynical, thinly disguised diversions.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his briefing, and once again commend his tireless efforts, as well as those of his teams, in responding to the urgency and gravity of the humanitarian situation in Syria. I would also like to thank Russia for requesting this briefing, which enables us to take stock of the humanitarian situation in both Raqqa and Rukban, a month and a half after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018).

I will say a few words on the humanitarian situation in Syria as a whole before addressing the specific cases of Raqqa and Rukban, and then finally reiterate our call for true assistance to their people by guaranteeing rapid and secure humanitarian access. That constitutes an key element of our draft resolution on Syria, which is still under negotiation among members of the Security Council.

Despite the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) and our repeated appeals, the urgency of the humanitarian situation in Syria is flagrant. The situation on the ground in Syria is a nightmare that sees no relief. As we have had the opportunity to highlight during each of the Council's meetings on the subject, the land offensives, sieges, indiscriminate bombings — including on schools and hospitals — and the use of chemical weapons against the people of Douma on 7 April have razed Syria to the ground, with complete disregard for international law. Resorting to terror as a tactic of war has led, as we all know, to horrific consequences. Moreover, since 18 February, at least 1,800 people have been killed and thousands are suffering from often irremediable wounds.

As Mr. Lowcock has just stated, the humanitarian tragedy in Syria remains a daily scandal and a permanent insult to the global conscience. Since 9 March, approximately 151,000 Syrians have been forced to flee eastern Ghouta. Between 90,000 and 100,000 of them were compelled to join the camps around Damascus, which have restricted access to basic services. To date, only 45,000 people have been authorized to leave the camps, where reception capacities are saturated. Despite the urgent situation, access to the camps is complicated due to the regime's intensified administrative procedures for humanitarian actors. Humanitarian access for people remaining in eastern Ghouta faces similar obstructions, especially in Douma. These are all tragedies and blatant violations of international humanitarian law.

In Idlib, the arrival of tens of thousands of people evacuated from eastern Ghouta has further exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the province, which

now hosts more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons. That means that we must be both active and vigilant when it comes to Idlib: active, in view of the very difficult situation that prevails there today, but also especially vigilant with regard to the risks of further outbursts of violence in the region. If we are not careful, the worst is yet to come in Idlib.

With regard to the situation in Raqqa, as Mr. Lowcock described in his briefing, the city is faced with the challenge posed by the return of 90,000 people. The challenge is certainly a considerable one. However, we must note some positive developments, such as the reopening of schools and three functioning clinics, as well as the distribution of schoolbooks, to mention but a few examples. It is henceforth necessary to allow humanitarian actors to channel water, food and other responses to meet the basic needs of the population. Given the situation left behind by Da'esh in the city, humanitarian demining also presents a crucial issue that all else depends on and where efforts already undertaken must absolutely be continued and augmented. That is an effort in which France is fully participating. We set aside €10 million at the end of 2017 and financed a dozen projects for displaced persons and those wishing to resettle in Raqqa in particular, as well as emergency aid, restoration of basic services, health care and mine clearance.

In Rukban, discussions with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent must lead to allowing the channelling and unloading of cargo by the United Nations, all while ensuring the safety of humanitarian personnel. As resolution 2401 (2018) has not been implemented, I wish to reiterate here, on behalf of France, our urgent appeal to guarantee rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory. That is indeed the key, along with the cessation of hostilities, to a real improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria. Specifically, that means that the Syrian regime must issue the necessary visas and letters of authorization to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other humanitarian actors, with three immediate operational objectives in mind.

First, a sufficient number of humanitarian convoys must reach areas that are difficult to access or besieged, and the safety of humanitarian personnel must be guaranteed. Secondly, civilians that remain in eastern Ghouta must receive urgent humanitarian assistance and protection. Thirdly, assistance must be provided to displaced persons, including in the camps and host communities around Damascus, in the Idlib province and in the Euphrates region. The regime's recovery of eastern Ghouta, in the terrible conditions we know of, does not change those imperatives, which fall under international humanitarian law and resolution 2401 (2018), adopted unanimously by the Council.

It is precisely those objectives that we strongly support in the context of the draft resolution submitted by France, the United Kingdom and the United States to members of the Security Council on Saturday and which was discussed at its first reading yesterday. Our draft resolution aims to achieve essential progress in humanitarian terms, fully consistent with the priorities expressed today. Given the catastrophic situation of the population, France has launched an emergency humanitarian programme of €50 million. The draft resolution also aims to recreate a mechanism for the attribution of responsibility with regard to the use of chemical weapons and to put a definitive end to the Syrian chemical programme. Finally, it requests that conclusive political negotiations be held under the auspices of the United Nations and with the support of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2018).

Finally, beyond the silo approach — which has led to so many impasses — the initiative France has taken with this draft resolution, alongside our British and American partners, articulates, for the first time, humanitarian, political and chemical aspects of the Syrian equation. Through this comprehensive and integrated approach, the draft resolution seeks to recreate a space for negotiation, establish potential areas of convergence and therefore — we hope — create the conditions for a truly diplomatic dynamic on the Syrian dossier. We all know how difficult the task is, but we hope that this approach will help us to break free of the impasse and open up the way to genuine negotiations.

Given the interest sparked by our draft resolution and by the first constructive discussions it has led to, this new approach is, in any case, broadly supported and involves committing on this basis to deepened negotiations that require good faith in the goal to reach a conclusion, even though we are all aware of how challenging that will be. We owe it to the Syrian people who, in their diversity, await us in despair.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Before I start, if I may make a request of the Secretariat — it would be very helpful, I think, for the Council to have either a

briefing or a brief account of where the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security currently are and what their forward plans are. Furthermore, it would be useful to know whether there has been any delay in their getting into Douma and an account of what has caused that delay. If it were possible to have that within the next 24 hours, I would be very grateful.

Turning to the issue before us in this meeting, I would like to join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing. It is a pity that some speakers have used today's account of the humanitarian situation to make political points. I recall the English philosopher Edmund Burke, who said that it is a general popular error to imagine the loudest complainers for the public to be the most anxious for its welfare. I think that might apply rather too much today.

We are talking about resolution 2401 (2018). I do not have the full compendium of the British Government's activities on the humanitarian side in Syria, but I can say that in 2017 we gave $160 million to the United Nations appeal and in 2018 we are giving $138 million dollars. That compares to $5.5 million in 2017 and, as far as I know, zero in 2018 from Russia. We are one of the top three donors to the Syrian humanitarian response plan, and we are the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in Syria since 2011. To date, we have committed $3.5 billion in response to the Syria crisis, and that is the United Kingdom's largest-ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. We encourage all of us to do what we can to support United Nations appeals and we, too, will be playing an active role in the Brussels conference, which is to come.

Turning to Raqqa, we welcomed the first United Nations assessment mission. The United Kingdom continues to provide humanitarian support to Raqqa and surrounding areas. Last October, we stepped up our support to north-east Syria by restocking hospitals and mobile surgical units and providing 145,000 medical consultations and 31,000 relief kits, which included cooking equipment and blankets. We helped improve access to clean water for 15,000 people. We are also contributing to the clearance of mines and explosives in Raqqa, and we are looking at ways to provide additional support to mine-clearance across Syria.

Turning to Rukban, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the Government of Jordan for providing humanitarian access to the population, including the distribution of essential aid in January 2018. Further, we commend the efforts of United Nations humanitarian agencies that have been negotiating access from Damascus. I would like to emphasize the right of displaced civilians in Rukban in the so-called berm to protection and sustained humanitarian services and distributions, whether they are cross-line or cross-border, in accordance with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

We urge the regime and its backers to facilitate access for the United Nations and humanitarian partners to deliver desperately needed assistance to the estimated 70,000 to 80,000 people in Douma and all those remaining in eastern Ghouta. Like other speakers, we too are concerned about the poor conditions in camps and sites where people from eastern Ghouta have fled. We look forward to a position where they can have freedom of movement and where they can be allowed to return home. In the meantime, they must be protected against regime reprisals, and we have, in consultations at an earlier stage, asked for more attention to be given by the United Nations, but also by the Syrian Government, to giving visas to United Nations staff who can go in and help perform a protection function.

I had intended to speak about the political resolution and next steps, but the French Ambassador has laid this out very clearly, and I have nothing to add to that but that I wholeheartedly support what he said. We call on all members of the Council to rally to the notion that we should use what has happened as an opportunity to get the political process back on track. We want to have a very good discussion of possible ways to do so at our retreat in Sweden where we will have the benefit of the presence of the Secretary-General as well.

In closing, I would like to end with one of Edmund Burke's more famous pleas: "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." We can all do something and I hope we will use the next days wisely.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for initiating today's open briefing on the very critical humanitarian situation in Syria, and we thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive and very informative briefing. Like others, we express our serious concern about the continuing severe and devastating nature of the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Turning to the main topic of our briefing today, we welcome the assessment mission to Raqqa that had been conducted by our humanitarian colleagues from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on 1 April. It is indeed worrisome that despite a high level of unexploded ordnance on the ground, an estimated 100,000 people have reportedly returned to Raqqa. The team has reported, through facts obtained by the local council, on the extremely high level of destruction, with nearly 70 per cent of buildings either having been razed to the ground or damaged, and many services, such as water, electricity, and health care, lacking or severely limited. Some schools have resumed but are without school materials and other supplies. It is commendable that the United Nations and local non-governmental partners are providing assistance to those in need in the city, and also responding to gaps and priority needs in the areas of essential aid and basic services.

We are also worried about the fate of the Rukban and Hadalat refugee camps, located on the way to the Jordanian border in the 55-kilometre-radius protected zone. According to our information, in both camps, about 85,000 refugees are living in tents. Many are ill and suffering from hunger and a lack of attention, owing to a shortage of doctors and medical supplies. We consider the camp to have the dangerous potential of turning into a place where anything goes — where foreign mercenaries, instructors and recruiters to the ranks of radical organizations operate without constraints. We are also alarmed at reports that armed groups do not allow humanitarian convoys of the United Nations and the Syrian Government into the security zone. We call for the World Health Organization and other United Nations humanitarian partners to be permitted entry into the camps.

We support the proposal of the Russian Federation to establish humanitarian corridors for the withdrawal of refugees from the area of Al-Tanf and the Rukban camp, using as an example of corridors created by Russian and Syrian military during the crisis in Aleppo, when thousands of civilians left the city. We also commend the authorities in Jordan who, earlier this year, have allowed a one-off delivery of United Nations humanitarian aid by crane-lift to tens of thousands of displaced persons from Syria.

Kazakhstan calls on all parties for an immediate suspension of all war activities in Syria, allowing humanitarian aid to reach all those in need, as well as evacuation of all patients requiring urgent treatment that cannot be provided there. Kazakhstan supports all the relevant Security Council resolutions so as to ensure principled, sustained and improved humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2018.

In the light of the prevailing circumstances, the need for all Council members to implement the recently adopted resolution 2401 (2018) is most critical. We look forward to ongoing frequent and periodic reporting to the Council on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) through the regular Syria briefings and the Secretary-General's reports, as stipulated in the resolution. In this context, we support the results of the second trilateral meeting of the Heads of States guarantors of the Astana process — the Presidents of Russia, Turkey and Iran — that took place on 4 April in Ankara. We believe that this summit of the troika is an important step towards the settlement of the Syrian war.

Lastly, we must focus on Syrian national unity, which is critical, particularly after the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. After the prolonged war, the question of boundaries and territories must be addressed in accordance with the Constitution in order to prevent a re-emergence of extremist groups. The issues before us are the legal and political future of Raqqa and must take into account the interests and rights of the various ethnic and tribal groups that compose the local population.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing.

Once again, Poland would like to strongly emphasize the utmost importance of providing sustained and uninterrupted access for all humanitarian actors in the whole of Syria. We call upon all parties to the conflict to implement the ceasefire and ensure humanitarian access and medical evacuations as unanimously agreed in resolution 2401 (2018).

We remain deeply concerned about the situations in Idlib governorate, which is struggling with the influx of new internally displaced persons, and in Aleppo province. In this context, we believe that military operations in north-western Syria have further complicated the situation and led to significant displacement of the local population, which is another source of our grave concern.

We would like to reiterate our strong call on all parties affecting the situation on the ground, especially

the Russian Federation and Iran, to take all actions necessary to arrive at the full cessation of hostilities across the entire territory of Syria. We insist that all parties in Syria comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Some small positive steps involving some eight convoys were taken in mid-March, which shows that it is possible to make progress even though much more is needed. Unfortunately, we have not yet seen any significant changes in that area. In that connection, we call on Russia, Iran and Turkey to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as Astana guarantors.

Like many others, we would like to underline the importance of the upcoming second Brussels conference. It will address the tragic humanitarian situation in Syria and reiterate the international community's support to those in need in Syria, as well as in neighbouring countries.

We would like also to take this opportunity to reiterate our opinion that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. We have always supported efforts to end the war in Syria.

In conclusion, let me once again underline that a political agreement remains the only way to achieve a sustainable solution to this conflict, including the lasting eradication of violent extremism. That requires a genuine political transition in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process. In that regard, Poland commends the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to facilitate the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to thank the Russian Federation for convening this meeting and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his illustrative and detailed description of the humanitarian situation in the city of Raqqa and the Rukban refugee camp.

Four months ago, in December last year, when Security Council members adopted resolution 2393 (2017), they noted the high numbers of displaced persons and refugees who had fled Syria to neighbouring countries as a result of the escalation of violence and the serious humanitarian crisis (see S/PV.8141). Since 2015, clashes in Raqqa have led many Syrian families to move to the Rukban camp on Jordan's northern borders, while Syrian opposition forces and Shia militias have been fighting at the Al-Tanf border crossing and the triangular border territory between Jordan, Iraq and Syria.

It should be recalled that Raqqa was the main Syrian stronghold of the Islamic State. The situation in Raqqa is particularly difficult, given that military offensives have led to the destruction of large swaths of civilian infrastructure and housing.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reiterates its deep concern about the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria, and in the case before us, in Raqqa and in the Rukban camp. We commend the efforts and work of the World Health Organization, which has been providing thousands of people in Raqqa with medicine and supplies. However, Raqqqa residents remain deprived of humanitarian assistance since there are no international humanitarian organizations in the region and local authorities cannot improve the situation.

Moreover, the situation of civilians returning to Raqqa, where they face ongoing danger owing to the high number of landmines and improvised explosive devices, as well as to the epidemiological situation in the city, with thousands of bodies still under the rubble of destroyed buildings, demands the utmost attention of the international community and the Security Council so that urgent action can be taken. In that regard, my delegation continues to encourage those countries with the capacity to influence the parties to the conflict to seek a way to achieve significant progress in implementing the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018) and in providing regular and sustained access to the people of Raqqa and the Rukban camp to international humanitarian organizations and United Nations convoys in order to care for the sick and wounded and to meet the urgent needs that cannot be met by sporadic deliveries.

We conclude our statement by recalling the desire and will of the peoples of Africa, as expressed in the communiqué of the African Union Commission of 15 April, which stresses that:

> "The Syrian people have suffered far too long. In the face of this dire situation, the only sensible course of action is the intensification of international efforts to find a lasting political solution based solely on

the interests of the Syrian people and respecting the territorial integrity of Syria."

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the Russian Federation for taking the initiative to organize this briefing on the humanitarian situation in Raqqa and Rukban. We also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his enlightening briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria, and in particular on those two localities in the framework of the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

Despite the recent relative lull, my delegation remains concerned about the precariousness of the humanitarian situation on the ground. Indeed, over two months after its unanimous adoption, my delegation notes with regret that resolution 2401 (2018) has not been implemented. It should be recalled that the resolution requires a long-term humanitarian pause to allow for the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance and related services, as well as the medical evacuation of the seriously ill and wounded, in accordance with applicable international law.

My delegation reiterates its call for the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) throughout the country — from eastern Ghouta to Douma and Afrin, where humanitarian needs are just as urgent — as well as in Raqqa and in the Rukban internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp, which is in the grip of a humanitarian disaster.

While terrorist groups have been defeated and driven out of the city of Raqqa, the return of people to their areas of origin remains problematic owing to the lack of infrastructure, including health and social infrastructure, as well as the lack of many services, such as water supplies and electricity. Furthermore, the presence of unexploded ordinance poses a serious danger for the population. According to the World Health Organization and UNICEF, between 20 October 2017 and 23 February 2018, at least 658 people were reportedly wounded and over 130 others killed by mines, booby-traps and unexploded ordnance in the city, where there were an average of six blast incidents per day. Limited access to care also aggravates the danger for people wounded by those explosions. In that respect, my delegation calls for the mobilization of the international community to provide the necessary assistance for the recovery of the wounded and to support demining activities and raise awareness of the dangers posed by improvised explosive devices.

With regard to the Rukban IDP camp, my delegation remains concerned about the extremely precarious living conditions of the local population, which are mainly related to the lack of access to the camp, which is regularly subject to sandstorms and rising water salinity. In addition, the location of that remote camp, with no road access, makes it difficult to provide medicine, food and drinking water to residents. My delegation urges the parties to the conflict to authorize humanitarian agencies to conduct missions to those areas to assess the needs of the populations and provide them with adequate humanitarian assistance, in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018).

Côte d'Ivoire believes that the international community's action, with a view to providing an adequate humanitarian response to the needs of the Syrian people, must be part of our overall collective efforts to seek a political solution to the crisis in Syria. We therefore reiterate our principled position in favour of a negotiated settlement of the Syrian conflict in the framework of an inclusive political dialogue among the different actors on the basis of the Geneva process, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015).

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): Let me thank Under-Secretary-General Mr. Lowcock for his informative briefing.

We welcome the opportunity to address the humanitarian situation in Syria and again call for the immediate implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) throughout the country.

The dire humanitarian needs of those inside Syria should be the focus of our attention, irrespective of the location of those in need. Humanitarian access and the protection of civilians remain our main priorities. As many have mentioned, the European Union and the United Nations will co-chair the second Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, which will take place in Brussels on 24 and 25 April. It is hoped that it will help raise funds to address urgent humanitarian needs in Syria, as well as garner political support for the United Nations-led peace process. Both are urgently needed. As the Syrian war enters its eighth year, we hope for the continued solidarity of the international community with the more than 13 million Syrians now in need of humanitarian assistance.

In my statement I will focus on three areas: the situation in Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin, the situation in Raqqa and the situation in Rukban.

First, with regard to Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin, the military offensive by the regime in eastern Ghouta has led to an additional 150,000 internally displaced civilians. After fleeing the violence, they are now hosted in Idlib and immediate surroundings in rural Damascus. Urgent shelter, food and medical care are needed for those who were forced out of their homes in Ghouta.

Reports of sexual violence against women are cause for great concern. Women, girls and others voicing concerns about gender-based violence should be heard and helped. At the beginning of the year, we held frequent discussions about the growing list of medical evacuees. There were 1,000 people on the list. We were appalled to learn that many of the severely sick and injured were on evacuation buses to Idlib for many hours. Such a trip is medically irresponsible. Those are not the kind of medical evacuations that resolution 2401 (2018) called for. Furthermore, those who remain in Douma need aid.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is concerned about the fact that no facilitation letters have been provided by the regime for aid convoys into Douma. I recall resolution 2401 (2018), which demands unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need. Access for that aid, as well as access to Douma for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, is urgently needed. We call for the independent monitoring of the collective shelters for internally displaced persons in rural Damascus. Families should not be torn apart by separating men from their wives and children. Where that has happened, the process of family reunification is needed.

The urgent needs of internally displaced persons throughout Syria call for a humanitarian surge. To that end, the United Nations requests entry into the country to help the Syrian population. We call on the Syrian regime to provide the additional staff from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with visas as soon as possible. We also call the attention of the Council to the plight of more than 180,000 people who have been displaced by hostilities in Afrin district. The massive influx of internally displaced persons puts a strain on host communities that are already overwhelmed. We call on all parties to allow for humanitarian access and for the freedom of movement of the internally displaced.

Secondly, the liberation of Raqqa from Da'esh has been a positive and decisive step in the fight against Da'esh in Syria. It is now important to contribute to the stabilization of Raqqa and to promote inclusive governance. The protection of civilians and of humanitarian organizations and other non-governmental organizations must be respected at all times. We welcome the fact that OCHA has been able to conduct a humanitarian needs assessment mission. On that basis, a coordinated humanitarian response can be deployed. The clearance of improvised explosive devices is a priority. Demining is essential so that internally displaced persons can safely return home. The Kingdom of the Netherlands contributes to demining activities in and around Raqqa and calls on other Council members to do the same.

My third point relates to Rukban, the so-called berm. The situation in Rukban, where more than 50,000 displaced people remain, is worrisome. The last food distribution took place in January. Apart from food, medical aid is also a necessity and should be made available to all those trapped in that area. It is important that aid reach those people through the fastest and easiest route.

Finally, let me conclude by again stressing the importance of the immediate implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) throughout Syria. Humanitarian access, as well as the protection of civilians, remains a necessity, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the initiative taken by Russia to convene today's public meeting.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing and commend the United Nations on its efforts to ease the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Syrian conflict has lasted more than seven years, inflicting endless suffering on the Syrian people. It is our strong hope that all parties in Syria can resolve their issues through dialogue and consultations. It is imperative that the international community play a constructive role to immediately ease the humanitarian crisis in Syria. As always, China will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria.

More than a month ago, through the concerted efforts of all parties concerned, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), reflecting its solidarity and consensus on the humanitarian situation in Syria. China calls on all parties in Syria to comply with the resolution in order to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities, provide humanitarian assistance and actively coordinate with United Nations humanitarian assistance efforts. The United Nations and the international community must implement resolution 2401 (2018), pay equal attention to the humanitarian situation in all regions in Syria, provide assistance to all areas in need of humanitarian assistance, and help displaced persons return home as soon as possible.

I reiterate that China has always promoted the peaceful settlement of disputes and objects to the use of force in international relations. We choose to respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of all countries. Any action taken by the parties concerned must be in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. All action must be taken within the framework of international law. Any unilateral military action that circumvents the Council contravenes the purposes and principles of the Charter and violates the basic norms of international law and international relations, and will compound efforts to settle the crisis in Syria. China urges the parties concerned to refrain from any act that could lead to an escalation of the situation, return to the norms of international law and resolve issues through dialogue and consultation.

A political settlement is the only way to resolve the situation in Syria. China is committed to working with the international community to facilitate peace talks, encourage the cessation of hostilities, violence and terrorism, and advance the process for a political settlement, including through the Geneva peace talks. Given the current situation, it is imperative for the international community to enhance cooperation and support the United Nations as the primary mediator to restore peace, stability and calm in Syria and the Middle East as soon as possible.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his briefing. We commend the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all the humanitarian agencies that have managed to deliver the humanitarian aid so needed by the people. We hope that those efforts can be duplicated in the besieged and difficult-to-access areas in order to reach as many civilians in need as possible. Bolivia believes that it is important to take all the measures necessary to ensure the reconstruction of Raqqa and other cities in Syria. We call on the relevant parties to spare no effort to ensure the safe and dignified return of the families that were forced to leave their homes for humanitarian and security reasons.

According to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/243), since October 2017, 86,000 civilians returned to the city of Raqqa, 20,600 of whom returned in February alone. We regret that 130 civilians died and 658 were seriously injured in accidents caused by remnants of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war. We reiterate the urgency of demining efforts, beginning with the clearance of explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, as a fundamental step for the safe return of the civilian population. Furthermore, such work is essential for the restoration of basic infrastructure and services to meet immediate humanitarian needs and facilitate long-term reconstruction. In that regard, we believe that the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service are key.

We regret that violence continues in the main cities of Syria, but it is even more reprehensible that as a result of those clashes civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and residential areas, has been affected. We also regret that obstacles remain to the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), and we call on all parties involved to make every effort to achieve its effective implementation throughout the Syrian territory, in order to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid and services in a safe, sustained and unhindered manner, in addition to the realization of medical evacuations of seriously ill and injured persons.

We remind the parties to the conflict once again that they must allow unconditional access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and guarantee and safeguard its security and integrity, especially in besieged and difficult-to-access areas. We reiterate once more our highest recognition of the work undertaken by humanitarian agencies, and we call for respect for international law and international humanitarian law in the discharge of their dangerous duties on the ground.

In conclusion, we reject any attempt at fragmentation or sectarianism in Syria,

and we believe that the Syrian people must freely decide its future and political leadership within the framework of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We reiterate that the only way to resolve the conflict is through a political process that is inclusive, negotiated, coordinated and led by and for the Syrian people, which will enable the achievement of sustainable peace in their territory, without pressure or interference.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank the Russian Federation for calling for this meeting. We are once again very grateful to Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. We reiterate our appreciation to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to provide assistance to millions of Syrians in difficult circumstances. We welcome the fact that the United Nations was able to conduct its first humanitarian assessment mission in Raqqa on 1 April, after the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

As mentioned by the Under-Secretary-General, the destruction of infrastructure, in addition to very limited public services, such as electricity and the sewage system, continue to be the major challenging features of the city. Moreover, the prevalence of land mines and explosives, which have continued to cause the deaths and injuries of civilians, poses a significant concern. That makes a safe return to the city a major challenge, although civilians continue to return. Demining efforts should be further strengthened and restoring normal life in the city should be the priority.

In that regard, we are encouraged that the United Nations is now preparing to deliver aid, and we hope that the returnees will receive humanitarian assistance in complement to the aid programmes. It is also imperative to deliver aid to all parts of the country. As the humanitarian crisis in Syria remains a source of deep concern, we reiterate that it is vital to ensure safe, unhindered and regular humanitarian access to allow the United Nations and its partners to reach those in need of life-saving assistance throughout Syria.

In that regard, we underscorethe importance of the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), which the Council adopted unanimously. We believe that to contribute to the alleviation of the ongoing suffering of the people of Syria, the Council should restore its unity through genuine and productive dialogue.

Finally, we fully endorse what the Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea stated with regard to the statement issued by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the situation in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

We thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his important briefing. We have taken note with deep concern of the information provided on the humanitarian situation in Raqqa and Rukban, the populations of which — like those of eastern Ghouta, Idlib, Afrin and many other locations in the Syrian territory — face the devastating consequences of the conflict in that country on a daily basis. We must condemn the indiscriminate planting of anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices by Da'esh. Those heinous crimes are contrary to international humanitarian law, and have unfortunately resulted in a large number of wounded and dead in Raqqa.

We welcome the efforts being made by various countries and organizations to clear those death traps, and stress the sense of duty displayed by the humanitarian demining professionals. We also welcome the deployment of a mission of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which delivered the first analysis of the current state of the humanitarian situation in Raqqa and recommendations for action to facilitate the safe return of its inhabitants over the medium term.

The humanitarian situation in Rukban is also a source of deep concern for Peru, given the difficult living conditions to which thousands of people, mostly women and children, are exposed. Peru recognizes the legitimate right of every State to protect its borders. However, we believe that the gravity of the situation in that area requires an enormous effort to provide unfettered access, as reflected in the adoption of actions aimed at facilitating access to deliver the required assistance, in line with international humanitarian law.

It is important that all humanitarian needs in Syria be addressed consistently, wherever they arise, without discrimination on the basis of political or military interests. The politicization of humanitarian assistance is unacceptable and blatantly contrary to resolution 2401 (2018), the provisions of which, we recall, must be fully implemented throughout the Syrian territory. I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is said that the Greek philosopher Diogenes used to walk around the city carrying a lantern in daytime. His followers asked him why he carried a lantern in broad daylight. His response always was: "I carry a lantern in daylight because it is very difficult to see the truth in daytime."

That quotation from Diogenes reminds me of some of our colleagues in the Chamber. It is as though they are carrying a microscope and trying to find a speck of dust anywhere, while disregarding the elephant that should be the focus of this and other previous meetings The elephant, of course, is the aggression initiated by permanent members of the Council against my country, the occupation of a third of my country's territory by the three countries that launched the attack, and another occupation that I will mention later. We truly need Diogenes in the Chamber.

My colleague the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States boasted that her country's forces were able to destroy 3,000 mines in Raqqa. Her country's forces, which continue to occupy Raqqa, helped 4,000 Da'esh terrorists relocate from Raqqa first to Deir Al-Zour and then to Al-Shaddadah in the north. I believe that it would have been better for the forces of her country to call on Da'esh to surrender its maps, revealing the location of tens of thousands of mines, instead of boasting that they had eliminated 3,000 mines from the city after expelling Da'esh from it a year and a half ago. They said they had been able to destroy 3,000 mines.

Allow me to address the fact that my colleague the Deputy Ambassador of Sweden referred to the Syrian Government 16 times in his statement. He called on the Syrian Government 16 times to various ends. However, not once did he call for an end to the American occupation of part of our territories. I will hold that against him. Not once did he call for an end to the Turkish and Israeli occupation of our territories. That is also something that I will hold against him. Not once did he call for condemnation of this week's aggression directed against my country. That is also something that I will hold against him. Not once did he mention anything concerning the terrorism prevalent in Syria, sponsored by the countries that I just mentioned, and the oil-producing countries of our region. And that is another point that I will hold against him.

As for my French colleague, he referred to a great deal of information that seems to have received from Doctors Without Borders, an organization similar to the White Helmets, which was invented by British intelligence service. Doctors Without Borders is also a French invention. Apparently, that organization is present in Raqqa. It is there without the approval of the Syrian Government. Just like Da'esh, it entered Syria without the Government's approval. Doctors Without Borders can be compared to smugglers without borders, criminals without borders, opposition without borders, foreign agents without borders, aggressors without borders and terrorists without borders. It would please our French and other colleague for the intervention in the internal affairs of Syria to be without borders forever.

I have listened to the false allegations, lies and deceitful statements propagated by certain delegations regarding the visit to Douma of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. I will share with the Council the following information. Of course, I am providing that information to please my colleague the British Ambassador because she requested a briefing within 24 hours. I shall now voluntarily provide such a briefing for her so that she will not have to wait 24 hours.

I have informed the Council before that the Syrian Government has taken all measures necessary to facilitate the arrival of the Fact-finding Mission to Syria. Today, the United Nations security team entered Douma at 3 p.m. Damascus time — 8 a.m. New York time — in order to assess the security situation on the ground. If the United Nations security team decides that the situation is safe in Douma, then the Fact-finding Mission will begin its work in Douma tomorrow. The decision to send the Fact-finding Mission to Douma was solely that of the United Nations and the OPCW. The Syrian Government has done all it could to facilitate the work of the Mission.

Furthermore, the Mission began its work upon its arrival in Damascus. Yesterday, its members listened to statements from witnesses about the alleged incident. As the Mission began its work, all these lies and rumours surfaced. They are false conclusions to distort

the Fact-finding Mission's outcome and ensure that people forget about the aggression.

Today's meeting is being held on my country's Independence Day commemorating our expulsion of the French colonial Power from Syria on this date in 1946. Unfortunately, some countries, including France and those that launched the cowardly attack on my country on 14 March, have failed to understand that the people's desire for liberty and independence is a reality, and that the days of hegemony are long past. Attempts to return to that time will not succeed regardless of the size of military fleets or the number of aeroplanes and the nice and new smart bombs. Despite the threat of force and the ongoing support for terrorism and armed groups under any pretext, the world's peoples have grown tired of the fact that influential countries continue to ignore the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. They have grown tired of the fact that those countries completely disregard the principles of international law with impunity.

My delegation thanks the Russian Federation delegation for requesting this meeting to discuss the situation in Raqqa — that martyred city that was completely destroyed by United States forces and their alleged coalition under the pretext of combating terrorism. I will not discuss the Syrian Arab Republic's assessment of the catastrophic conditions in the city. I will only share with the Council the outcome of the United Nations assessment mission to Raqqa, submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates in Damascus and contained in an official note from the United Nations Resident Coordinator on 4 April:

> "Raqqa is facing a dire situation that requires a complete rebuilding and restructuring of public services and administration from the ground up."

That is a quotation from the United Nations, and not from Doctors Without Borders — or Clowns Without Borders.

Allow me to mention some of the conclusions of the mission.

First:

> "The mission witnessed the extensive destruction of the city. Every building was either partially or completely destroyed."

It does not say 70 per cent or 80 per cent. The city is completely destroyed.

Secondly:

> "The city, whose residents were estimated at about 300,000 people before the crisis, is now home to around 7,000 people at the end of the offensive by the coalition."

They managed to help 4,000 Da'esh terrorists leave the city, but that also led to an exodus of 300,000 of the city's population.

Thirdly:

> "There is a complete lack of public services: no water, no electricity, no cell phone coverage and no basic services.

Fourthly:

> "Hospitals and clinics were destroyed. Currently there is no hospital in the city, except for Doctors Without Borders."

What happened in the city of Raqqa is one example of the crimes of the so-called coalition led by the United States against Da'esh. The coalition never meant to combat terrorism, but rather to undermine the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of my country and to weaken the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in the fight against terrorist groups. The coalition's real achievement was to kill thousands of innocent civilians with the worst and most destructive weapons, including incendiary weapons. They have destroyed Syrian infrastructure, including dams, bridges, hospitals, schools, development facilities and institutions of the Syrian people, as well as their economic resources necessary for reconstruction, notably oil and gas wells, facilities and workers.

I would also like to remind the Council, for example, of the massacres against civilians in the towns of Al-Mayadin and Al-Bukamal in mid-May 2017; in Al-Sour, Al-Dablan, Al-Mayadin city, and Thibyan village in rural deir ez-Zor, towards the end of June 2017; in Tel Al-Shayer on 19 June 2017; in Al-Zayanat village on 4 July 2017; in Al-Kashkash village on 12 July 2017; in southern rural Al-Sahaka; in Al-Shafa village and Thahrat Alouni on 25 February 2018; and in Al-Bahra village on 20 February 2018.

The illegitimate coalition never meant to combat terrorism, but to place obstacles in the way of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies as they sought to combat Da'esh, the terrorist organization — for instance, the air strikes launched by coalition war planes against the

Syrian Arab Army in the Al-Tharda Mountain in deir ez-Zor on 17 September 2016. Members will recall what happened back then, as follows.

The coalition — United States — war planes were trying to provide safe passage to Da'esh terrorists between Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, on 8 February 2018, United States war planes targeted Popular Forces on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River. Those forces were fighting against armed Da'esh terrorists. The war planes killed dozens of these reserve Popular Forces.

The coalition has not only launched an aggression against the Syrian Arab Army, but it also gave support and protection to residuals of Da'esh forces by providing safe passage to its elements from Raqqa and deir ez-Zor, most of them foreign terrorist fighters. They gave them instructions to attack the forces of the Syrian Arab Army and their allies in deir ez-Zor. That is how the United States forces saved the remaining Da'esh terrorists from certain death at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army so that they could wreak havoc along the border between Syria and Iraq.

The United States, France and Britain culminated their support to armed terrorist fighters through the tripartite aggression on 14 April, with the participation of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel, as an act of revenge against the Syrian Arab Army following the defeat of the terrorist proxies of those Governments in eastern Ghoutta.

When we talk about the catastrophic humanitarian situation caused by this illegitimate coalition in the city of Raqqa, we must talk about the situation in the Al-Rukban camp. I underscore that the Syrian Government approved the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the camp in cooperation with International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. However, the United States forces present in the camp prevented the delivery of that assistance and put impossible conditions for its delivery. The United States is responsible for the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the camp. We stress that the main reason for this American position is that they are using the camp to train Da'esh terrorist and other terrorist groups so that they can be used in other battles against Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and other countries in the region and the world.

In conclusion, I am talking here about the elephant that I mentioned at the beginning of my statement. The political situation in Syria is clear and does not need draft resolutions, mechanisms or semi-daily meetings under different agenda items. The situation needs the Security Council to carry out its mandate under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations by standing against the American, Turkish and Israeli occupation of parts of my country, Syria, and standing against countries supporting terrorists groups. The Security Council also must stand against countries imposing coercive measures against the Syrian people, so that millions of Syrian people are not made refugees and internally displaced persons, as some colleagues have said. The Council must not bend to the will of the Governments of the United States, Britain and France. This is a United Nations Organization. Do not turn it into an organization that is not united. They only unite in order to violate the provisions of the Charter, invade countries, interfere in their internal affairs, try to change their Governments by force, launch one aggression after the other and destroy peoples and their civilizations.

The meeting rose at 6.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8237

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8237th meeting

Wednesday, 18 April 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana Torrelio
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Mrs. Nakamitsu: I thank you, Sir, for the invitation to brief the Security Council on the incident in Salisbury, in the United Kingdom, on 4 March 2018. As I have no independent information on this issue, I will be conveying information kindly provided by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The Council has met previously to discuss the 4 March incident in Salisbury involving a toxic chemical — allegedly a nerve agent — and the poisoning and hospitalization of three individuals as a result. As the Council is therefore aware, and as part of its response to this incident, the United Kingdom requested technical assistance from the OPCW Technical Secretariat under article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which states that the Technical Secretariat shall provide technical assistance and technical evaluation to States parties in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention, including evaluation of scheduled and unscheduled chemicals.

Accordingly, the OPCW Director-General decided to dispatch a team to the United Kingdom for a technical assistance visit. The technical assistance team deployed to the United Kingdom on 19 March for predeployment and from 21 to 23 March for full deployment. In the course of its work, the team received information on the medical conditions of the three individuals affected and collected blood samples from those individuals, under full chain of custody, for delivery to the OPCW laboratory and subsequent analysis by OPCW-designated laboratories.

In addition to those activities, the team conducted on-site collection of environmental samples, again under full chain of custody. The team also requested, and received, splits of samples taken by British authorities for comparative purposes and to verify the analysis of the United Kingdom. The team was briefed on the toxic chemical that had been identified by the United Kingdom. It reviewed the analytical results and data from chemical analysis of biomedical samples collected by the United Kingdom authorities from the affected individuals and of environmental samples collected on site.

The OPCW has since stated that the results of the analysis of biomedical samples conducted by OPCW-designated laboratories demonstrate the exposure of the three affected individuals to that toxic chemical. In addition, the results of the analysis of environmental samples conducted by OPCW-designated laboratories demonstrate the presence of the toxic chemical in the samples. Finally, the results of the analysis by the OPCW-designated laboratories of the environmental and biomedical samples collected by the team of the OPCW technical assistance visit confirm the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical that was used in Salisbury on 4 March. The technical assistance visit team noted that the toxic chemical in question was of high purity.

Based on the results of the sample analysis by four OPCW-designated laboratories, the OPCW Technical Secretariat prepared a report containing and elaborating on the information that I have just shared. On 12 April, that report was transmitted to the United Kingdom and, at the request of the United Kingdom, to all other States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The OPCW has also prepared and made publicly available a summary of the report.

Speaking at a meeting of the OPCW Executive Council today, the Director-General underscored that the reliability and technical capabilities of the OPCW-designated laboratories have been subject to close and rigorous scrutiny over the years. He added that the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention can be assured of the credibility and integrity of that network. He further noted that the work of the technical assistance visit in relation to the incident was carried out by the OPCW independently without the involvement

or support of other States parties and that it was not part of the United Kingdom's own internal investigation.

The Secretary-General has expressed his deep concern about the assessment that a nerve agent was employed in a targeted manner aimed at inflicting harm or death. On many occasions, the Secretary-General has also expressed his support for the work of the OPCW. In that regard, he welcomed the request of the United Kingdom to independently verify the toxic chemical that was used in the incident. The use of nerve agents — or any other chemical weapons — by any party under any circumstances is unacceptable and is a serious violation of international law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who briefed us on the findings of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). On behalf of the United Kingdom, I would also like to thank the OPCW and its staff. The Security Council invited us to keep it updated. I thank you, Mr. President, for agreeing to this meeting today. We wish to brief the Council on the most recent stage in the investigation. I will also cover briefly findings, attribution and a refutation of some of the public statements that have been made by Russia against my country. This meeting is being held immediately after the meeting of the OPCW Executive Council in The Hague to which the High Representative referred.

If I may, I would just like to stress that the report itself has been circulated without any redaction or amendment to the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). To underscore that point, I would like to underscore that the report to the members of the Executive Council is exactly the same report as the United Kingdom itself received. As the High Representative set out, the findings of the OPCW confirm the United Kingdom's analysis of the identity of the toxic chemical. It supports our finding that a military-grade nerve agent was used in Salisbury. As our investigation has found and as the OPCW has verified, the highest concentrations of the agent were found on the handle of Mr. Skripal's front door. It is therefore the chemical that we said it was. That has been confirmed by an independent mechanism.

I would like to say a word about the use of the term Novichok. It is a term that we use to describe such chemicals. We use the Russian term for such nerve agents. The OPCW report itself does not use the term Novichok. However, the point that I wish to make is that it is the chemical that we said it was. There should therefore not be any lack of clarity on that point.

The report sets out the full forensic chain of custody. It sets out how there could be no contamination. It explains how the environmental samples are analysed by two laboratories and the biomedical samples by two further laboratories. Finally, the report notes the absence of any significant amounts of impurities in the chemicals that were detected. High purity is the description given in paragraph 11 of the executive summary. That in turn suggests that a highly sophisticated laboratory — that is, a State laboratory — made the chemicals.

The identification of the nerve agent used is an essential piece of technical evidence in the ongoing investigation. However, the Porton Down analysis and the OPCW report do not identify the country or the laboratory of origin of the agent used in the attack. I would like to explain the wider picture that has led the United Kingdom to assess that there is no plausible alternative explanation than Russian State responsibility for what happened in Salisbury. In our view, only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to target the Skripals.

First, if I may turn to the technical means, a combination of credible open-source reporting and intelligence shows that in the 1980s the Soviet Union developed a new class of fourth-generation nerve agents. In Russia, and then more broadly, they were known as Novichoks. The key institute responsible for that work is a branch of the State Scientific Research Institute for Organic Chemistry and Technology at Shikhany. The code word for the offensive chemical weapons programme of which Novichoks were one part was "Foliant". It is highly likely that Novichoks were developed to prevent detection by the West and to circumvent international chemical weapons controls. The Russian State has previously produced Novichoks and would still be capable of doing so today. Within the past decade, Russia has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks.

Russia's chemical weapons programme continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 1993, when Russia signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, it

is likely that some Novichoks had passed acceptance testing. That meant that they could be used by the Russian military. Russia's declaration under the CWC failed to report work on Novichoks. Russia further developed Novichoks after ratifying the Convention. In the mid-2000s, President Putin himself was closely involved in the Russian chemical weapons programme.

It is highly unlikely that any former Soviet Republic other than Russia pursued an offensive chemical weapons programme after independence. No terrorist group or non-State actor would be able to produce that agent in the purity described by the OPCW testing. That is something that Russia has acknowledged.

Secondly, I would like to refer to operational experience. Russia has a proven record of conducting State-sponsored assassination, including on the territory of the United Kingdom. The independent inquiry into the death of Alexander Litvinenko concluded in January 2016 that he had been deliberately poisoned with polonium; that the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation had directed the operation; and that President Putin probably had approved it. During the 2000s, Russia commenced programmes to test means of delivering chemical warfare agents and to train personnel from special units in the use of such weapons. That programme subsequently included the investigation of ways to deliver nerve agents, including by application to door handles. Within the past decade, as I said, Russia has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichok under this programme.

Thirdly, there is motive. Sergei Skripal was a former Russian military intelligence officer from the Main Intelligence Directorate. He was convicted of espionage in 2006. It is highly likely that the Russian intelligence services view at least some of its defectors as legitimate targets for assassination. We have information indicating Russian intelligence service interest in the Skripals, and this dates back at least as far as 2013 when email accounts belonging to Yulia Skripal were targeted by Main Intelligence Directorate cyberspecialists. None of those stocks and production have been declared in Russia's chemical weapons declaration. It is clear that Russia is in breach of its obligations to declare its chemical weapons programme.

If I may, I would now like to turn to an update on the Skripals themselves, their medical condition and the consular situation, before turning to the investigation itself. The Russians asked us to pass on the offer to provide consular services to Yulia, as well as their request to see her, and we have done that. Yulia herself said in a statement on 11 April:

> "I have access to friends and family, and I have been made aware of my specific contacts at the Russian Embassy who have kindly offered me their assistance in any way they can. At the moment, I do not wish to avail myself of their services, but if I change my mind I know how to contact them."

According to the medical update from the Medical Director at Salisbury District Hospital, in the four weeks since the incident in the city centre, the Skripals have received round-the-clock care from clinicians, and they have been able to draw on the advice and support from world-leading experts in this field. Because of the Skripals' right to privacy, I will not go into great detail about the treatment we have been providing. However, we can say the following. Nerve agents work by attaching themselves to a particular enzyme in the body, which then stops the nerves from working properly. That results in symptoms such as sickness, hallucinations and confusion. The hospital, in treating the patients, was able to stabilize them, ensuring that the patients could breathe and that blood could continue to circulate. They then needed to use a variety of different drugs to support the patients until they could create more enzymes to replace those affected by the poisoning. The hospital also used specialized decontamination techniques to remove any residual toxins. Both patients have responded exceptionally well to the treatment that we have been providing, but both patients are at different stages in their recovery.

Turning to decontamination and the investigation, as we have said before this has been one of the most comprehensive and complex investigations into the use of chemical weapons ever undertaken. It has involved 250 police detectives. They have been supported by a range of experts and partners, and they have gone through more than 5,000 hours of video footage. They have interviewed more than 500 witnesses. The British Government announced on 17 April that decontamination work in Salisbury is starting this week, and it will take some months to complete. In total, nine sites, including three in the city centre, have been identified as requiring specialist decontamination. That will involve a complex process of testing, the removal of items that could be contaminated and that might, in turn, harbour residual amounts of the agent. It also involves chemical cleaning and retesting. All

waste will be safely removed and incinerated. Each site will not be released until decontamination is complete.

We have heard a number of allegations against the United Kingdom and against the findings from the Russian Federation. If I may, I would like to deal briefly with some of the most egregious.

One accusation that we have faced today and in recent days was that Yulia had not been poisoned — that the British Government had in fact drugged her, put her in a coma and then injected her with the poisons that were found. That is more than fanciful; it is outlandish. That sort of thing may happen in Russia, but I can assure the Council that it does not and will not happen in the United Kingdom.

Secondly, the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Sergei Lavrov, has claimed that traces of the toxic chemical BZ were found in the samples analysed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and this disclosed the location of one of the independent laboratories that the OPCW used. The OPCW itself has not disclosed the identity of the labs, nor have they published any information about BZ samples in the executive summary that they released to the public. So, it is an interesting question: How and why does Russia think it knows who tested the samples and what result they found? By making that confidential information public, Russia has in turn breached the confidentiality that States parties owe the OPCW under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

On the substance of that allegation, the Director-General of the OPCW explained in his statement today that a sample separate from the samples taken from the Skripals and their environment was sent along with the samples taken from Salisbury to the designated laboratories for testing. That is called a control sample, and it is a routine procedure carried out in these tests so that the OPCW can test whether the labs' findings are accurate. The Director-General has confirmed unreservedly that there was no BZ in any of the samples taken by the OPCW in Salisbury. I believe that Russia is fully familiar with this procedure, so I would be grateful to know what motive Mr. Lavrov had in setting out this obfuscation.

Russia continues to be asked to be involved in the United Kingdom's independent investigation. It is quite clear both that it is suspected of involvement and that its behaviour has undermined its credibility on this. As I said before, this is an arsonist and firefighter trying to investigate his own fire. Russia has failed to establish any good reason under the CWC or otherwise why it should be involved in the United Kingdom's independent police investigation. I repeat what I said at the first Council briefing in which I took part concerning Salisbury (see S/PV.8224). We did go to the Russian Federation before we went to the OPCW to ask if this was a rogue attempt by one of its agents, and if so to cooperate with us in trying to get to the bottom of it and resolve the case. The Russian Federation did not agree to that request. Rather, it refused to take it seriously.

On 13 April, the Russian Federation transmitted to the United Kingdom a list of questions under article IX of the CWC. We will respond as soon as possible and certainly within the 10 days stipulated in the Convention. We will respond to Russia, which made the request, but we will share our response with all States parties. Furthermore, if the CWC allows, I will of course share it with members of the Council. Russia said that its requests were urgent, and it has asked us for an answer by no later than 17 April, which we have not done because we have 10 days to respond. However, we regret that Russia did not consider it urgent when we asked it for an explanation on 12 March. Our questions remain unanswered.

That concludes the briefing I have to offer the Council today. We are at the disposal of the Council to answer any questions. We are also very willing to continue to keep the Council updated if the Council would like that. We are happy to do that in person, or possibly, so as not to disrupt the timetable, in writing. I should mention also that we held an open briefing for all Member States yesterday at the General Assembly, and there were a number of questions that we were able to answer.

Mr. Zambrana Torrelio (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing, of which we take due note. Secondly, we welcome the speedy recovery of those affected by the incident in question.

Bolivia believes that the use of chemical weapons by any actor in any circumstance is despicable as an act that undermines international peace and security, and we therefore reiterate our concern about the challenges being posed to the non-proliferation regime. Any

use of toxic chemical weapons, agents or products as weapons is completely reprehensible to humankind and is contrary to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as international law. The Chemical Weapons Convention is a multilateral instrument adopted by 192 States. It is important that this model multilateral agreement continue with the same integrity and independence.

It is essential to maintain the credibility of that international instrument in the face of allegations of the use of toxic chemical weapons, agents or products, and to that end any investigation must be conducted strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. In that regard, we believe that all provisions of the Convention should be used in any investigation to address the concerns raised by the relevant parties in accordance with the procedures set out therein. This research must be broad, impartial and objective in order to reach evidence-based conclusions.

Finally, it is essential that the countries concerned use the appropriate diplomatic channels in order to comply with the principles of mutual respect and bilateral cooperation so that this situation can be resolved through as much dialogue as possible, especially with a view to strengthening the non-proliferation regime.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing. I thank my British colleague for keeping the Security Council updated.

Last week, the Council met five times to discuss the chemical weapons attack in Douma. Today we are here yet again to talk about chemical weapons. This time it is about a military-grade nerve agent used against two people on British soil. In the constant push of meeting after meeting here in this Chamber, it is easy to lose track of what this means. We are rapidly confronting a frightening new reality. If chemical weapons can appear in a small English town, where might they start appearing next? None of us will be immune from this threat unless we immediately start rebuilding our consensus against chemical weapons.

I will not engage in an argument over self-evident facts. I will not trade accusations of shameful behaviour with those who have no shame. I will not waste the Security Council's time. I will only say this — the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has released an independent report that confirmed the United Kingdom's lab analysis of the toxic chemical that was used in Salisbury. Three people were seriously injured. Hundreds were exposed. This act was brazen and in complete defiance of the international consensus against the use of chemical weapons.

As we have stated previously, the United States agrees with the United Kingdom's assessment that Russia is responsible for the chemical weapons in Salisbury. Whether it be through Russia's direct act or the result of its irresponsibly losing control of the agent, which could be worse, our support for our British friends and colleagues is unwavering. Douma and Salisbury are just the two latest incidents involving the use of chemical weapons around the world. They offer us a reminder that these are weapons of terror. They are indiscriminate. They have no place in the civilized world.

We hope our colleagues on the Security Council will join us as they have before in delivering a clear condemnation of the use of a Russian nerve agent on another Member's soil, because unless we stop this now, there will be more death and more scenes that nobody wants to see. There is nothing more troubling than the idea that the use of a weapon of mass destruction becomes routine.

Last year, it was Malaysia and Khan Shaykhun. Last month, it was Salisbury. Last week, it was Douma. If we do not come together soon and take a firm unequivocal stance against this deadly trend, the next attack will come, and it could very well come closer to home for one of us. Then, of course, it will be too late — too late for the victims, too late for the wounded survivors, too late for the women and children. This is a matter of basic morality. We cannot in good conscience allow this to continue.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United Kingdom for this very timely update on the circumstances of the chemical-weapons attack in Salisbury on 4 March. I also thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, for her very clear briefing.

The day after the hostile act of 4 March, France expressed its full solidarity with the United Kingdom, and I wish to reiterate it here today. We unreservedly shared the British analysis that, on the one hand, it is highly probable that the Russian Federation is responsible for the attack and, on the other hand, there are no other plausible explanations for the attempted

assassination of Sergei Skripal and his daughter. We have drawn the necessary conclusions.

I commend the United Kingdom's commitment to transparency and the way in which it has conducted this matter, in full accordance with the relevant provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. I recall in this regard that the Convention requires States to conduct their own investigations of an event occurring on their national territory and that the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is to play an independent and impartial assistance role. These provisions have been fully followed and respected in the matter before us today. I also reiterate our full support for the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat teams, whose commitment and professionalism I commend.

The OPCW results, as they have been presented to us, now speak for themselves. They confirm the British conclusions. A high-quality chemical agent, Novichok, considered to be militarily produced, was indeed used in Salisbury against Sergei Skripal and his daughter. The characteristics of this chemical agent, independently identified by each of the OPCW laboratories, and in particular its high level of purity, testify to a know-how that only a State could master. Its manufacture and handling require equipment and expertise that cannot be improvised.

In the light of these elements, possible motives and precedents on British territory, the United Kingdom legitimately asked the Russian Federation to answer a series of questions. These questions have all remained unanswered for over a month now. We therefore call on Russia once again, since it claims to want to cooperate, to respond to the British questions without delay. Russia must provide all necessary clarifications on the possible development of such a chemical-weapons programme.

The increase in number of chemical attacks appalls the conscience of the world, violates the law and threatens our security. It is not only a major affront to the international community and to the Security Council; it also raises the risk of a terrible regression for all of us. Indeed, let us make no mistake. In Salisbury, Douma and elsewhere, the oldest and strongest foundations of our collective security have been deliberately violated, and thus put at risk, while the forums charged with speaking out and enforcing the law are systematically hampered. That is the heart of the matter.

Let us make no mistake. Those who obstruct our action, who violate and deceive with respect to their commitments, who deliberately carry out disinformation campaigns and distort the facts with a view to dividing and disorienting public opinion are responsible for a serious normalization of the use of chemical weapons. Furthermore, they contribute to the risk of undermining the non-proliferation regime at a time when they should be its guarantors.

France, which suffered first-hand the devastating effects of chemical weapons during the First World War, will never allow their use to go unpunished, whether in Syria, Europe or elsewhere. Any time a chemical weapon is used, regardless of where and by whom, all light must be shed on that use and those responsible must be held accountable. However, that is not enough. We must do everything we can to curb the serious threat of the normalization of the use of chemical weapons. That should be our shared priority. That is the whole purpose of the partnership we launched in Paris, which 28 States and organizations have chosen to join, including four this past week alone. Faced with such a threat to our collective security, there can be no room for impunity. That is also the whole point of our action on the Syrian dossier.

The repeated use of chemical weapons undermines international law and challenges our ability to safeguard the values, principles and rules that underpin the United Nations and our work. Because the very foundation of our security is threatened and because we must live up to our commitments and responsibilities, there is no other acceptable or possible option than to come together to restore the essential taboo prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. Let us walk that demanding path together. The international community can rest assured of France's commitment to that end, alongside all its partners.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

China has been closely following the developments related to the Salisbury incident since it took place in the United Kingdom in March. We support addressing the issue within the framework of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. I wish to reiterate that China is firmly opposed to the use of chemical weapons

by any State, any organization or any individual under any circumstances. That is our categorical and consistent position.

We take note that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has recently issued a report on technical assistance provided with regard to the Salisbury incident. At the same time, we also note that the parties concerned have yet to agree on mutually acceptable conclusions. Further investigations are required to determine the nature of the incident and the parties to be held accountable. China believes that a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation should be conducted, and on the basis of solid evidence, conclusions that can stand the test of facts and history should be drawn. In the current circumstances, all parties should pursue their consultations and carry out further investigations to uncover the truth.

The international community is facing numerous challenges and all parties should reject the Cold War mentality, join hands to maintain world peace, stability and security; remain committed to a new type of international relations based on mutual respect, equity, justice and win-win cooperation; and build a community of a shared future for humankind. Council members in particular should remain united so as to jointly fulfil the responsibilities of maintaining world peace and security.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I would like to thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Poland has already expressed its grave concern about the use of the nerve agent in the attempt to murder Mr. Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal on 4 March in Salisbury, United Kingdom.

The report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has confirmed the findings of the British Porton Down laboratory on the agent used in Salisbury. It clearly indicates that the reaction of the international community in support of the United Kingdom was appropriate. We are grateful to the British Government for sharing, in the spirit of transparency, the results of the technical assistance visit. We also thank the OPCW leadership and the technical assistance visit members for the outstanding and professional work they have done in that regard.

Let me recall that the European Council has agreed unanimously with the Government of the United Kingdom's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible for this incident. In that situation, we repeat our call on Russia to address the legitimate questions raised by the British Government and now corroborated by the results of the OPCW's technical assessment visit report, and to provide immediate, full and complete disclosure to the OPCW of any programme with relevance to the case.

Poland would like to restate its strong conviction that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be identified and held accountable. The incident in Salisbury is yet another example of a violation of international law and the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. As we have said many times, no such act can be left unanswered since it not only undermines the basic sense of justice, but also leads to the erosion of the non-proliferation and disarmament regimes, and in consequence undermines the security of all of us.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the United Kingdom for having initiated this briefing on the letter (S/2018/218) of 13 March from Mrs. Theresa May, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, following the events that took place in Salisbury on 4 March. We also thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing.

Côte d'Ivoire takes note of the findings of the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirming the identity of the nerve agent used in Salisbury on 4 March, which led to the poisoning and hospitalization of three people. It welcomes the British authorities' request to the OPCW to share the report with all States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and to make its summary public.

My country is paying particular attention to the follow-up to the investigation conducted by the British authorities with a view to conclusively shedding light on that incident. We call on the various stakeholders to exercise restraint and to cooperate with the investigation, in accordance with their international obligations. My country reaffirms its principled position condemning any use of chemical weapons, regardless of the perpetrators, in times of both peace and war.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the collective efforts under way to establish an accountability mechanism with regard to the use of chemical

weapons. The international community's commitment to combating impunity remains fundamental to ensuring respect for the non-proliferation regime and for our shared commitment to achieving a world free of chemical weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank High Representative Nakamitsu for providing us with an update on the current status of the ongoing investigation into the incident that took place in Salisbury. We would also like to share the following observations.

Kazakhstan closely follows the developments of the case, which is undoubtedly a blatant and unacceptable criminal use of chemical weapons. At the same time, it is clear that there are no conclusive findings on those responsible. The case definitely requires further objective and transparent investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the crime.

Regrettably, the subject of the use of chemical weapons has become a regular item on the agenda of the Security Council. As it happens, the same subject is also the Achilles heel of the Council, as it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to pass judgment since we are not experts on the chemical substances used in this particular incident. It is also difficult to maintain the constructive dialogue and goodwill required to reach balanced and consensus-based decisions because of increased politicization surrounding the issue.

The confrontational spirit and rhetoric in the Council are being transferred to other forums and platforms, including The Hague discourse, where States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention are also becoming divided. It is now a challenge for them to hold professional and exclusively technical discussions on highly important issues. Leading countries are unable to reach a compromise and find common ground for negotiations that will build mechanisms for countering the threat of chemical weapons. It is regrettable that such weapons of mass destruction, which had been relegated to the past, are being used again.

As a country affected by the consequences of weapons of mass destruction, we remain firmly committed to the fight against the use of chemical weapons and are ready to take constructive part in the development of an investigative tool. Kazakhstan counts on and looks forward to an ongoing, comprehensive, objective and transparent investigation into the incident, in accordance with existing norms of international law. We call on parties concerned to exercise restraint and refrain from hasty actions, without providing full and irrefutable evidence of the involvement or culpability of one side or the other.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons now has a even more complicated but very crucial task — to render all possible assistance to resolve the tense relations between the States members of the Convention. The organization must realize its important role as an objective and impartial mediator. It is the best and most qualified advocate for the non-proliferation agenda. Patient dialogue and constructive cooperation from all sides are the main factors for achieving best results.

As the main body for ensuring international peace and security, the Council should not allow divergent positions on the threat of weapons of mass destruction. It could lead to escalating conflict and high tensions that could derail its work.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking the United Kingdom for taking the initiative to update the Security Council.

I also thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her comprehensive briefing.

Sweden has been clear in condemning in the strongest terms the attempted murder of individuals with a nerve agent on British soil. We fully stand by the common position of the European Union on the matter. We share the assessment of the Government of the United Kingdom that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible and that there is no other plausible alternative explanation. We reiterate our strong solidarity with the United Kingdom, our close friend and European Union partner, and our support for its ongoing investigation. We welcome the open and transparent manner in which the United Kingdom has approached the matter, including by arranging an open briefing yesterday for all Member States.

We also welcome the continued cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. We thank the OPCW for its prompt reaction to the request of the United Kingdom and for its professionalism. Sweden has full confidence in the authoritative findings of the OPCW, which confirm the

identity of the toxic chemical. It is a matter of utmost concern. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to answer questions posed by the United Kingdom. Let me take this opportunity to underline our full support to the OPCW, the independent organization tasked with overseeing the chemical weapons ban.

Once again we condemn in the strongest terms the use of all chemical weapons, which is repugnant and strictly prohibited under international law. We must be vigilant in our efforts to ensure that the integrity of the chemical weapons ban is respected.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea thanks you, Sir, for convening today's meeting at the request of the United Kingdom. We also thank the United Kingdom for sharing the findings of the investigation conducted by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

We thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea has closely followed the developments surrounding the use of a nerve agent in Salisbury on 4 March. According to the report issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the results of laboratory tests of the blood samples taken from Mr. Skripal, his daughter and the police officer have confirmed that they were exposed to high purity toxic chemical agents. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea condemns in the strongest terms the fact that the toxic chemical was used on human beings. I request that we find a way to determine without a doubt the person or persons responsible for using that substance so that the proper legal action can be taken.

There should be no doubt or speculation surrounding the identity and culpability of the perpetrators. Conclusive evidence is required, such as the results of tests conducted by the OPCW to determine and confirm the chemical agent to which Mr. Skripal and his daughter were exposed on 4 March. In that regard, we congratulate the OPCW on its excellent work and professionalism. As investigations continue to unravel the plot and identify the perpetrators, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea requests that the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the United Kingdom show restraint and find an appropriate and reasonable way to manage the situation through direct contact. We hope that the diplomatic crisis can be resolved.

Equatorial Guinea's wishes Mr. Skripal, his daughter and the British police officer affected by the attack a full and speedy recovery.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Equatorial Guinea's complete rejection of the manufacture, stockpiling, use and distribution of chemical weapons, wherever and by whomever. Once again, we stress the importance of establishing a transparent, independent and professional monitoring mechanism to determine those responsible for the use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank the United Kingdom for taking the initiative to convene today's meeting. We also thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is the appropriate international body to address the incident in Salisbury. We know that it has presented its report on the activities carried out in support of a request for technical assistance by the United Kingdom in relation to the incident. We also followed the fifty-ninth meeting of the Executive Council of the OPCW, where the issue was discussed in the morning at The Hague. We take note of what the Director-General of the OPCW said in his opening statement with regard to questions arising about the result of the analysis, including assurances that the OPCW will continue to use the Executive Council meetings or briefings to inform the States parties about its activities and clarify certain points that need to be addressed. Indeed, the issue is very sensitive and its implication for global peace and security is so grave that it is vital that the OPCW does so, and we appreciate its work.

We agree that preserving the credibility and integrity of the international regime on the use of chemical weapons is vital to global peace and security. Of course, we understand that the work of the OPCW technical team was limited to identifying the toxic chemical used. As was discussed at the Executive Council meeting today, the OPCW report did not identify the country or laboratory of origin of the agent used in the attack. It will therefore still be important to ensure that a thorough, professional and independent investigation is undertaken. We believe that will be essential for getting to the bottom of the truth and bringing those responsible to justice.

What is clear from the Salisbury incident, and all the other chemical-weapon attacks that have happened recently, is that the use of chemical weapons is becoming normalized and the international norm on the issue is being seriously undermined. That should be extremely worrying to us all. The use of chemical weapons by any actor, under any circumstances, is totally unacceptable, and we reiterate our strongest condemnation. However, we know and understand that we can address that serious challenge only if all of us provide the necessary cooperation and abide by the rules that we set ourselves in all transparency and fidelity to the truth.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to begin by thanking the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the update provided by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom on the latest developments in the follow-up to the shocking chemical-weapon attack that took place in Salisbury last month. I will make three points. First, I will reiterate our condemnation of the attack and reaffirm our solidarity with the United Kingdom. Secondly, I will welcome the clarity provided by the independent findings of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Thirdly, I will urge the Russian Federation to change its course and cooperate fully.

First, on the unacceptable nature of the attack. At both the previous meetings on the matter (see S/PV.8203 and S/PV.8224), we expressed our shock about the reckless attack with a military-grade nerve agent on British soil. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has strongly condemned that attack in the Security Council and on many other occasions. We stand in full solidarity with the United Kingdom and fully subscribe to the conclusions of the European Council on 22 March.

Secondly, last Thursday, at the specific request of the United Kingdom, the full report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was shared with all member States of the OPCW. That report, containing the analysis of environmental and biomedical samples, was carried out at the request of the United Kingdom. In doing so, the United Kingdom has acted in full accordance with OPCW procedures, as has been confirmed by the Director-General of the OPCW. We appreciate the transparency observed by the United Kingdom in the process. The OPCW's independent analysis confirmed the findings of the United Kingdom's authorities that the attack on Yulia and Sergei Skripal was carried out with the use of a specific type of Novichok. That fact is now beyond dispute. We welcome the clarity that the OPCW report has provided.

Thirdly, there is a need for Russian cooperation. The findings of the OPCW report have made it even more evident than before that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation bears responsibility for the attack. There is no plausible alternative explanation. In that light, it is not helpful that the authorities of the Russian Federation continue to disseminate alternative, implausible versions of the events in Salisbury. Nor do we approve of attempts by the Russian Federation, at the OPCW and elsewhere, to create procedural hurdles for the United Kingdom's authorities to carry out their follow-up to that chemical attack on their sovereign soil.

We urge the Russian Federation to change its course and cooperate fully. We urge the Russian Federation to provide the United Kingdom with all information relating to unanswered questions about the course of events in Salisbury on 4 March. We call on the Russian Federation to cooperate with efforts to bring those responsible to justice and to provide full disclosure of its Novichok programme to the OPCW. In conclusion, any use of chemical weapons constitutes a threat to international law, peace and security that is unacceptable. I reiterate our call for full accountability for that horrific crime.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her valuable briefing on the outcome of the report published by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on 12 April, concerning the incident that took place on 4 March in Salisbury, United Kingdom, with the use of a toxic chemical substance that led to the poisoning and hospitalization of three people. I would also like to thank the representative of the United Kingdom for her detailed briefing on the latest developments. Allow me to reiterate my best wishes to the victims of this incident, a father and his daughter, and to the policemen and civilians affected by the attack for their quick recovery.

The laboratory analysis of the OPCW confirms through environmental and biomedical samples the use during the incident in Salisbury of toxic chemical substance with a high degree of purity, classified as neurotoxins. The State of Kuwait reaffirms its firm

position condemning the use of chemical weapons by any party, in any circumstance and in any place. We also condemn the production, acquisition, stockpiling or retention of chemical weapons, as well as their direct or indirect transfer, in line with article I of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), to which the State of Kuwait has been party since 1997.

We express our solidarity with the United Kingdom and support it in all actions and measures to be taken regarding the investigation of that incident. The State of Kuwait believes in the importance of abiding by international law and international norms, and in upholding the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We call on all parties concerned to cooperate with all the ongoing investigations through the OPCW and in accordance with the provisions of the CWC.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing, and we are so very grateful to the British for convening today's meeting, which we were eagerly awaiting. Unfortunately, however, we have not heard anything new from it today.

When I listen to some of my colleagues, I feel that we have already moved on from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and are in *Through the Looking Glass* instead. Our Western partners are not interested in the truth, and not just on this matter. They are not listening and they will not hear. In Russian we say that you are talking to them about Foma and they are talking to you about Yerem — in other words, we are talking about apples and oranges.

Today we heard the same lie that the United Kingdom has already used to try to mislead the international community. It is claimed that the United Kingdom has not received from us the answers to the questions that it requested. For the Council's information, I would once again like to point out that the questions that we have been asked actually consist of that same 24-hour ultimatum that boils down to one question: "Why did you do it?". Nevertheless, some of Britain's allies, with a level of persistence that deserves a better subject, have repeatedly urged us to answer the United Kingdom's questions and cooperate with it. If they have questions that we have not been asked, perhaps they can pass them on to us, assuming that Britain is not going to give us any additional questions. We would be very grateful.

Today we heard the same series of unsubstantiated accusations, now allegedly backed up by the authority of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Let me say right away that there is nothing in the OPCW report that supports the mendacious British version of Russia's involvement in the Salisbury incident. The main thing that is not there, and that the British were dying to see, is any conclusion that the substance used in Salisbury was produced in Russia. On the contrary, the speedy analysis conducted by the OPCW only confirms that such a substance could have been produced in any laboratory that had the right equipment. After all, in order to conduct a comparative analysis one must have a standard for the toxic compound, and such laboratories exist in the United Kingdom at Porton Down, and in the United States and a number of other countries. The formula for the substance has been known since 1998, when it was included in the database of the National Institute of Standards and Technology by the United States Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center. Moreover, a search in the Google Patents online resource for the key word Novichok produces results for more than 140 patents issued in the United States alone that are related to the use of and protection from exposure to that toxic chemical.

Six weeks have already elapsed since the Salisbury incident on 4 March, and yet the gaps in this story, held together by the weakest of threads, have not only not diminished, they have multiplied at startling speed. We are not surprised by London's behaviour. At today's meeting of the OPCW's Executive Council, the British representative, whose statement was as usual based on lies and disinformation about Russia's motives, methods and means, declared yet again that

(*spoke in English*)

> "Russia has a proven record of carrying out State-sponsored assassination." Proven by whom?

(*spoke in Russian*)

Naturally, that was followed by numerous references were made to the Litvinenko affair, adducing arguments based on British jurisprudence's new vocabulary, such as

(*spoke in English*)

> "President Putin 'probably approved it'"; "'the Russian State may have been involved'"; "'the Russian State may have sponsored attacks'";

"there have been numerous suspected Russian State-sponsored assassinations".

(*spoke in Russian*)

Everything that we have seen and heard today is déjà vu. We went through all of this in the Litvinenko poisoning affair, with a complete lack of transparency from the British, who to this day have concealed any documentation that could have enabled us to put together a full picture of what had happened to him at the time. For those who do not know, I can inform them that the United Kingdom has simply classified that information.

London's modus operandi with respect to the 12 April report of the OPCW technical assistance team was no exception to this. In the one and a half pages of the document that were made public, the British forbade the OPCW's experts not only from mentioning the type of technical assistance that they had requested but even from naming the toxic chemical identified by Porton Down, preferring to conceal all that information in the confidential section of the report, whose discussion in an open Council meeting would violate the OPCW's confidentiality rules. The reason that was done seems obvious to us.

Well, if the British will not grant Council members the right to discuss what they authorized to be included in the substantive part of the report, we will discuss what is not there. Above all, what is not there is any mention of the Russian Federation, which corresponds to the conclusions that we have already heard from Porton Down. There is not the slightest mention of the extremely crucial information on the factors in the contamination of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and Nick Bailey. Nor is there any information about the history of their illness or treatment.

There is no explanation as to how a toxic chemical that is extremely unstable in liquid form, according to its alleged creator, Vil Mirzayanov, could have been detected in a high concentration almost three weeks after the incident. Nor is there a word about why this substance, which is allegedly 10 times more deadly than VX, could affect some victims seven hours after contact while others succumbed instantly. And why then — thank heavens — were the effects not fatal? Perhaps Vil Mirzayanov and the Porton Down experts are talking about different toxic chemicals.

Moreover, there is no sensible explanation in the report of how a blood sample from one of the victims taken 18 days after the incident could have contained an undecomposed toxic chemical identified by Porton Down, while this was not observed in the other victim, who suffered a more toxic level of contamination. That scenario is not only uncharacteristic for paralytic nerve agents, it might also be an indirect indication that it is highly likely that before the sample of the toxic chemical identified by Porton Down was collected, the victim was injected with the agent while in an induced coma, which is why there was no biochemical reaction.

That raises an important question. On 5 April, when I quoted Boris Johnson on the presence of samples of A-234 at Porton Down, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom (see S/PV.8224) responded to the effect that the United Kingdom is permitted to conduct research for defence purposes. Perhaps the experts at Porton Down have investigated and are in possession of this and other toxic chemicals that are not on the relevant Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) lists. I believe that as part of the preparations of the report of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Director-General of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW for the fourth CWC Review Conference, now would be the time for the Porton Down experts to inform the scientific community about their research on A-234 for defence purposes and perhaps on other toxic chemicals that pose a threat to the goals of the Convention. But let us not labour under illusions. The line that Britain has decided to take on the Salisbury incident has made it clear that that will not happen. The United Kingdom and its allies simply have no interest in a professional discussion, while professional chemists and experts cast ever more doubt the further they go into the official British version.

Unfortunately, London's free interpretation of the provisions of the CWC only raises questions. For example, the British consistently refer to the fact that their national investigation is being conducted in accordance with paragraph 1 of article VII of the Convention. These references would be justified if it were not for one "but", which is this kind of investigation pertains only to physical and legal individuals who are under British jurisdiction. I do not believe it is necessary to point out that Russia is not under British jurisdiction. That goes without saying. In that regard, we request a clarification from the British as to whether the statements from Downing Street about Russia's alleged

involvement in the incident in Salisbury represent an attempt to put political pressure on the investigative work or the ultimate conclusions of a Scotland Yard investigation. Or it normal under the British legal system for the Government to identify the guilty party and for its investigative bodies to subsequently tailor their investigation to fit that conclusion?

I want to once again stress that any doubts about the good-faith compliance by a State party with its obligations under the Convention must be resolved, as laid down in article IX. They must be resolved, and we know of no other meaning for the English words "shall" and "should". We would be grateful for possible explanations from native English speakers about cases when those words do not imply obligation. It would be very helpful for our future practical work in the Council.

Since our repeated proposals to London to begin cooperating under article IX have been ignored, and the requests of Russia's Prosecutor General, in line with paragraph 2 of article VII, about providing legal assistance on criminal cases, have gone unanswered, no alternative remains to us but to initiate our own request under paragraph 2 of article IX with a list of questions for the United Kingdom on the incident in Salisbury on 4 March. A note to that effect was sent on 13 April by Russia's Permanent Representative in The Hague to the British via the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

In that connection, and with the aim of taking measures to strengthen the CWC, we believe it is essential that the Director-General of the Technical Secretariat should prepare and introduce at the next meeting of the OPCW Executive Council, in accordance with paragraph 5 of article XV of the Convention, a draft resolution amending the annex to the Convention listing chemicals. That would not only enable the substance A-234, identified by Porton Down, to be officially classified as a chemical warfare agent, it would put it and its precursors under the OPCW's systematic control. That is what should have been done long ago by the countries that, as it turns out, had all of the necessary information, including samples of this toxic chemical, rather than using the forums of the OPCW and the Security Council to disseminate their groundless allegations that the Russian Federation is in breach of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The information campaign, or rather war, that the British authorities have unleashed on Russia around the so-called Skripal case is no secret. The norms of international law and of law in general, the principles and rules of diplomacy, common sense and simple basic politeness are being ignored. Against a background of deafening silence on the part of the competent British authorities on the merits of the case and a multitude of politically tinged declarations and pronouncements that have been aimed at Russia from the very beginning, new versions of what happened continue to appear, and significant discrepancies, plants and open disinformation are surfacing that London has no intention of refuting in any way. The fake rumours are spreading. The calculation is that down the road, thanks to this cacophony of unfounded accusations and references to respected organizations such as the OPCW — which allegedly fully confirmed the British conclusions about Russia's involvement, and which, I will say it again, is a total lie — Governments and society will not be able to sort out the subtleties of chemical analysis and the numerous inconsistencies in the accusations that have been made. As a famous quotation often attributed to Winston Churchill has it, "There is no such thing as public opinion. There is only published opinion." And the British and their allies have no problem with their lying assertions being disseminated by the media.

The British asked us two questions. We asked them 47 questions. Here they are. We received partial responses to two of them. There are no answers to the questions that we asked during the previous Security Council meeting on the issue on 5 April. We will have more questions. We have promised them that we will not let this go.

In order to acquaint the Council with the scientific and factual side of this affair, we will circulate separately the Russian representatives' statements at the OPCW's fifty-ninth session of the OPCW, along with a chronology of the events prepared by our Embassy in London and a copy of my statement today.

While all the shouting is going on, the British authorities have been busy working systematically to eradicate any evidence or material proof. The household pets have been destroyed and clearly no samples were taken of them. The places that the Skripals visited — the bar, the restaurant, the bench, the soil in the park and so forth — are being cleared, while ordinary citizens continue to live in Salisbury as if nothing had ever

happened. Yulia Skripal's whereabouts are unknown, and the Consulate has been given no access to her as a Russian citizen. Let me remind the Council that nobody has seen Yulia or Sergei since 4 March. Meanwhile, a crime — an attempted murder, with suggestions that it might be terrorist in nature — was committed against Russian citizens.

I would once again like to affirm our principled position, which is that we will not accept the results of any national or international investigations without having at our disposal the entire body of information — whether that is data from the criminal investigation or full technical laboratory reports — without the granting of our right to consular access to Russian citizens and, most importantly, without the direct participation of Russian experts in all operations designed to clarify what took place in Salisbury on 4 March. The only thing that we believe is unarguable right now is that London is continuing to conceal information that is critical to establishing the truth, and will not permit any transparency on the issue.

The British Embassy in Moscow once again distinguished itself when a few days ago it put out the following sensational piece of information, roughly the same as that given by the British Permanent Representatives to the OPCW and to the United Nations in today's letter to the Secretary-General (S/2018/218). First, Russia has been producing and stockpiling Novichok for the past 10 years. Secondly, research into the use of chemical warfare agents for assassination purposes has been conducted in Russia. Thirdly, beginning in 2013, Russian intelligence expanded its interest in Sergei Skripal.

Brilliant. Bravo.

I will now return to the letter from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations that she circulated today, including to the permanent members of the Security Council. As usual, it is packed with lying, unfounded and slanderous allegations. As usual, it features vocabulary such as "highly likely", "may have been" and "suspected". The United Kingdom has previously had the audacity to make categorical assertions about our chemical declarations and to discuss the working methods of our intelligence services. However, this time our British colleagues went even further. They accused President Putin of direct involvement in a military chemical programme, without quotation marks, references or mentions of "highly likely". I have always been astonished and amused by the far-fetched suggestions of our British colleagues — and not theirs alone — about how the Russian system of Government works. In London they clearly believe that the Russian President has a hobby. Any free time away from his official duties is spent on chemical-weapon programmes. I do not know if the people in London or the Permanent Mission here realize that they have gone beyond the bounds of acceptability and propriety. I think they should thank our President for being so restrained.

Why is all this necessary? The answer is banal in its obviousness. This is an attempt to defame Russia generally and to cast doubt on its legitimacy and role in the international arena. I did not say that Salisbury and Douma are connected lightly. First, because both are provocations and secondly, because both are being linked to Russia. This is an unscrupulous incitement against Russia that is designed to deepen the divide between Russia and the European Union, something that is clearly particularly timely for the United Kingdom on the eve of Brexit. That is all.

In conclusion, it seems that the moment has come to wield the classics — in this case, our Shakespeare, who in *Henry VI, Part III*, said, "Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind". Now that is how the British should try to prettily package their so-called suspicions, because otherwise they are somehow not very convincing. We even feel bad for them.

We will eagerly await the continuation of this gripping serial. If Britain drags in some new information or sensation in the spirit I have cited today, we reserve the right to request such a meeting ourselves. The United Kingdom should not think that it can hide behind its poisonous web of lies and conjecture. It has not ended with the report of the OPCW technical assistance visit. We will continue to demand that it give us the facts.

There is undoubtedly chemistry in this affair — the chemistry that links it to the Russian word for "swindle". Yes, they have pulled off quite a swindle. But we agree with them on one point. There will be no impunity and those responsible for this provocation must be held accountable.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We would like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing. We are grateful to the representative of the

United Kingdom for the information that she provided to us.

Peru has noted with deep concern the incident caused by the use of a nerve agent in public spaces in the United Kingdom, which has seriously endangered the lives of at least three people. We would like to reaffirm our solidarity with the victims, to whom we wish a full recovery, and with the people in the United Kingdom who have been potentially exposed to the chemical agent in question. Peru condemns all use of chemical weapons. We believe that such a practice constitutes a threat to international peace and security, a heinous crime and a flagrant violation of the related non-proliferation regime. In the light of the investigations and the report issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the blood samples of the direct victims of the attack, we must emphasize that the Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits the use of any substance as a chemical weapon.

Lastly, we urge the parties concerned to fully cooperate with the investigations with a view to determining responsibilities and penalties as a result of the incident, in line with the principle of the peaceful resolution of disputes.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has asked to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I will be brief. I was asked a number of questions by the Russian Ambassador. I have nothing to add to what I said in relation to the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that has just been published and the way in which the samples were taken. I have nothing to add to what I said on the consular aspect. I would like to stress that the investigation in the United Kingdom is indeed independent of the Government. With regard to selective adherence with regard to the OPCW or the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), we are a State party in very good standing. On the question of Porton Down, the United Kingdom does not possess chemical weapons. Porton Down is a defensive establishment that conducts research and provides scientific and technical support to the United Kingdom Government in relation to protection against chemical weapons. Protective research is permitted under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Porton Down is full compliance with the Convention and is subject to regular inspection by the OPCW. Any member State is invited and permitted to conduct an inspection at any time.

We received 16 questions from the Russian Federation under article IX of the CWC. The rules of the OPCW and the articles of the CWC make it clear that we have 10 days to respond, and we will respond. With regard to President Putin, I am happy to clarify that I was referring to the early 2000s. With regard to Litvinenko, the polonium trail literally led all the way back to Russia.

I would like to repeat something that I have said before. We respect Russia as a country. We have no quarrel with the Russian people. But we will always speak out against reckless and illegal behaviour on the part of the Russian authorities, whether it takes place in Syria or in Salisbury.

Finally, when Christmas comes, I would like to buy my colleague the Russian Ambassador a subscription to an English book club. But as it is not Christmas, I would like to return his literary favour today. The Russian account of the behaviour of the United Kingdom and what is happening on the ground in both Salisbury and Syria is a rewrite of George Orwell's *1984*, updated for the modern day and modern Russian methods.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8238

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8238th meeting
Thursday, 19 April 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Ms. Samson
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Identical letters dated 19 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/53)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/279)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before we proceed to the item on our agenda, it is with great shock that I wish to inform the members of the Security Council of the sudden passing yesterday of our dear colleague and friend, the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue.

There are no words to express our feelings of sorrow at this sad news. On behalf of all members of the Security Council, I express our deepest condolences to the wife and family of the Ambassador, as well as to the Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire for the loss of a great diplomat who always participated in Council discussions with independence and in a constructive manner. He was committed to the Charter of the United Nations, the maintenance of international peace and security, and the need to put an end to the suffering of millions of people affected by conflicts and humanitarian crises, especially in his own dear continent of Africa. We will remember him with great respect and appreciation.

I therefore ask that we all now rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of our dear colleague, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Identical letters dated 19 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/53)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/279)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Colombia to participate in today's meeting.

On behalf of the Security Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia, and Minister for Foreign Affairs María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar and their team.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/279, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Arnault.

Mr. Arnault (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by expressing my personal condolences to the Government and the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire on the passing of Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. His resolute support for our work has been a great source of encouragement for the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

(*spoke in English*)

It is a privilege to share once again the floor with Vice-President Óscar Naranjo Trujillo in the presence of Foreign Minister María Ángela Holguín. Both have been firm pillars of the peace process during both the negotiation and the implementation phase, and we are grateful for the close and supportive relation they have maintained with the Mission.

On 11 March, millions of Colombians turned out to vote in congressional elections that were a clear step forward in the country's transition from conflict to peace. The elections were also a milestone in the transition of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) from weapons to politics. The presidential election is now five weeks away, and against a background of polarization, the campaign so far has continued the trend towards a reduction of electoral violence.

Among legislative developments since the publication of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/279), let us also note that a couple of weeks ago the Constitutional Court endorsed the Law on the Status of the Opposition — a piece of legislation

derived from the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace that had previously been on the agenda of Congress since the adoption of the current Constitution in 1991. In particular, it provides opposition parties with access to media, additional funding and representation in the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives for runners-ups in the presidential and vice-presidential elections. In addition, last night, the same Court unanimously declared constitutional the political participation of FARC, including the 10 seats in Congress provided for in the Peace Agreement. This is a particularly important ruling at this juncture.

With regard to the socioeconomic reintegration of FARC members, the Superintendent of Banks issued the expected decree to facilitate the opening of bank accounts for FARC cooperatives. It confirms that entities under the supervision of the Superintendent can provide banking services to former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) in the process of reintegration on an equal footing with the rest of the population, and that, with the exception of individuals on international sanctions lists, the entities cannot deny those services to persons on account of their being former combatants.

With respect to security guarantees, a significant development was the approval two days ago, after many months of consultations with a large array of civil society organizations, of a programme for the security and protection of communities, organizations, social leaders and human rights defenders. The programme was one of the main commitments in the Peace Agreement. It supplements the current focus of the National Protection Unit on the protection of individual leaders with a more collective approach to the security of communities, which is in line with challenges that have been identified in the countryside by State institutions, social organizations and the Mission itself. The programme also provides for a ground-up approach to security on the appropriate premise that local authorities and communities are best placed to identify threats and protection measures. We will provide maximum support for its implementation.

The last couple of weeks have also brought new challenges to the peace process. The arrest of one of the leaders of FARC on drug trafficking charges reverberated in a country that remains divided around the peace process. From the FARC leadership, and particularly from the party's President Timoleón Jiménez, calls for calm and statements of resolve to continue to pursue the path of the Peace Agreement have been very important in addressing misgivings and mistrust among former combatants in the reintegration areas. In addition, the Government has stated its commitment to accelerating the implementation of the Peace Agreement, particularly with regard to reintegration. We welcome the fact that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace is able to take on its responsibilities in relation to this case, in accordance with the Peace Agreement.

We also agree wholeheartedly that there is a need for a sustained drive to put the reintegration of former combatants on a more solid basis before the end of the Government's mandate. Weakness in this effort can only increase the risk of the drift of some ex-combatants to criminal groups, such as those responsible for the tragic killings and kidnappings of Ecuadorian nationals operating in the border area with Ecuador. As mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report, the ingredients for a such a breakthrough in reintegration are well-known — viable productive projects, functional cooperatives and the availability of land — and much of the legal and technical preparation has already been done. We look forward to the prompt approval of the decree allowing access to land to former combatants.

I mentioned earlier the new programme on the protection of communities. I should note that with its adoption, implementation of the most important commitments of the Peace Agreement with regard to security matters is under way: the National Commission on Security Guarantees, the Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, the Police Elite Corps, the strengthened early warning system of the Office of the Ombudsman, and the National Protection Unit's special protection measures for FARC are in place. Furthermore, the decree on the Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics was passed and endorsed by the Constitutional Court.

The Secretary-General reported on the activation of the National Commission on Security Guarantees, on whose leadership we continue to count to focus the attention of institutions on bringing much-needed security to the countryside and address the threats and attacks against community leaders and human rights defenders. In this respect, the Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General has now expanded its investigations to cover killings of those leaders

after initially focusing primarily on the assassination of FARC members. As of this month, it has assumed 58 such cases of community leaders and human rights defenders. It is currently giving priority to those with a view to achieving results as soon as possible.

While it is obviously too early to take stock of a peace process that has set ambitious and long-term goals, we have already observed that it has achieved a notable reduction of violence in the context of the congressional elections. Similarly, it has created a series of institutions dedicated to overcoming patterns of social, economic and political violence in the conflict areas. That is a substantial change, and the next few months provide an opportunity to bring together Government institutions, local authorities and social organizations to press forward with that agenda.

As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional have resumed. The Catholic Church and the Mission, which supported the implementation of the temporary ceasefire at the end of last year, have presented their recommendations to both parties to support their effort to reach a more reliable ceasefire. The two parties have reiterated their interest in United Nations support in the implementation of a future ceasefire. The Security Council will obviously make the appropriate decisions in due time. Meanwhile, we will do our best to ensure that the design of the ceasefire is as robust as possible.

Throughout the implementation phase of the Peace Agreement, circumstances have occasionally tested the commitment of the two parties to stay the course. They have stayed the course. The unanimous support consistently voiced by the Council has helped sustain that resolve. It will continue to be a source of confidence and strength.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Arnault for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): It is an honour to have Their Excellencies the Vice-President and the Foreign Minister of Colombia with us today.

On behalf of the British people and Government, I too would like to begin by expressing my condolences to our colleagues of Côte d'Ivoire, to the family and friends of Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue, and to our friends in Côte d'Ivoire and its Government and people. It is indeed a great loss and we send them all our condolences and sympathy.

Turning to Colombia, it is very good to have the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia with us again. He and I have known each other for a very long time. I would like to thank him for his work and that of his entire team on the ground. This is a historic peace agreement. I think Colombia is to be congratulated on taking this tremendously important and historic step that ended 50 years of conflict. It is a huge achievement and serves as a global inspiration for others. It shows what can be done for peace when there is bold leadership.

From its experience with Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom knows that the implementation of such agreements is very challenging. I think that it has proved to be no less challenging for Colombia. The United Kingdom is proud to stand with Colombia in support of the implementation process and the country can rely on us to do so in the months and years ahead.

I was very interested to hear from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General about some of the remarkable progress that has been achieved over the past three months, in particular his remarks with regard to the ruling and the banks. Those were an important steps forward. We also welcome the congressional elections in March, which saw the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) participate in Colombia's democratic process for the first time. We believe that this is indeed a key point in FARC's political transformation and a truly remarkable achievement, given the short time since the signing of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace in 2016. We also welcome the progress that has been made in implementing the Agreement, notably on structures for truth, justice and reparations for the victims of the conflict and the activation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons — two very important steps.

On the resumption of talks with the National Liberation Army, we welcome the return to dialogue, but I would also like to mention the very real challenges that remain for the implementation of the Final Agreement. Those challenges include continued insecurity in some of the areas affected by the

conflict, and they can include violence and threats against former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). The protection measures, including FARC participation and close protection of its leaders, are key steps in helping address that, and it is vital that the Government's strategy for security guarantees is properly resourced and coordinated with the police, the Office of the Attorney General and judicial authorities. I was reassured by what the Special Representative of the Secretary-General had to say about the arrest of the FARC leader. We would like to echo those calls for calm and for ensuring that the provisions of the Peace Agreement continue to be followed.

One of our other concerns is the levels of violence against community leaders and human rights defenders. It is very good that the Special Investigation Unit of the Office of the Attorney General will be able to investigate those attacks.

The launch of plan Horus represents a bold and comprehensive response to security challenges in vulnerable areas and we look forward to seeing an ongoing approach to stabilization that is coordinated with police and civilian agencies. I think that will be vital for long-term stability.

Turning to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, we would like to thank its staff, and Mr. Todd Howland in particular for his leadership at the Office. We welcome the appointment of his successor, Mr. Alberto Brunori. The Office has played a key role in supporting the peace process and we will continue to watch its work very closely.

In the next weeks and months, it is vital that reintegration projects are active in all 26 areas for training and reintegration. That will help prevent further former FARC-EP members from joining dissident groups. We look forward to seeing resources unlocked and timelines accelerated for crop substitution, rural development and the reintegration of former combatants.

The United Kingdom encourages further progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement over the coming months to support continued progress towards a sustained peace in Colombia. Colombia can definitely count on the United Kingdom's continued and deep support.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): On behalf of the Chinese Mission in New York and me personally, I express our deepest condolences with regard to the untimely passing of Ambassador Tanoh-Boutchoue to his family and to the Permanent Mission and Government of Côte d'Ivoire. Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue was a senior diplomat and our close colleague and friend. His passing is extremely tragic.

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia, for his presence and Her Excellency the Foreign Minister of Colombia for attending the meeting. I thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing.

The Colombian peace process is crucial to achieving comprehensive peace and development in Colombia. It is also instrumental to maintaining peace and stability in the whole region. China commends the commitment and relentless efforts made by the Colombian Government, President Santos Calderón, and all other parties concerned.

A comprehensive implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace signed between the Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) is central to the Colombian peace process. Currently, the implementation of the Peace Agreement is facing some challenges. We hope that the parties concerned in Colombia can meet each other halfway, overcome difficulties and continue to consistently facilitate the peace process in order to maintain the positive momentum of the Colombian peace process and establish conditions conducive to the full implementation of the Peace Agreement between the Government and FARC-EP.

The Colombian peace process is irreversible, based on a high-level consensus among all parties in Colombia and the international community. The Security Council and the international community must continue to play close attention to and support the peace process, respect the ownership of the Government and the people of Colombia with regard to the process and provide constructive assistance to the overall implementation of the Peace Agreement.

China commends the important role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Arnault, and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia in facilitating the Colombian peace process. We hope that the Mission will continue to enhance its communication with the Government and

the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común and do more to build trust and facilitate the implementation of the peace agreement.

China applauds the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) for honouring its commitment to a unilateral ceasefire during the parliamentary elections this year. We hope that the Verification Mission will continue to leverage its role in urging the ELN to reach a new ceasefire agreement with the Government as soon as possible.

Together with other members of the Council, China is ready to make a greater contribution to the ongoing facilitation of the peace process and the early achievement of overall peace and security in Colombia.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): Let me say how heartbroken we are to learn of the passing of our dear friend and brother, Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations. We thank you, Sir, for arranging the minute of silence in his memory and for your remarks on our behalf.

The departure of our friend was so sudden, untimely and completely unexpected. For three or four weeks, he had not been himself. He had become unduly introspective. Nonetheless, he never ignored his absolute loyalty to friends in whom he confided his innermost feelings. One could not find a better person at a time when good people are sorely needed. It is a time when standing up for the truth and what is right has become indispensable to regional and international peace and security. He has left us extremely heartbroken. We express condolences to his family, colleagues and fellow countrymen.

Turning to today's subject, we thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Arnault, for his briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/279). We are honoured and pleased to see His Excellency the Vice-President of Colombia here with us today. We also acknowledge the presence of Her Excellency the Foreign Minister of Colombia.

The congressional elections held on 11 March send a positive message to all those who closely follow the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace. It sends a positive message, not only because it was concluded in a peaceful manner, but also because it is of symbolic significance, opening a new chapter in the country's encouraging political trajectory following five decades of conflict. We congratulate both the Government of Colombia and the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común on their commitment, as well as on that tremendous achievement.

For reasons that are most obvious, we follow and care about the success of the Colombian peace process. For us in Africa, it is a source of inspiration. The Colombian Peace Agreement has rekindled a sense of hope and optimism for peace and stability in the country. The patience and perseverance shown in facing the challenges in the implementation process has begun to show results. The Council should continue to provide the necessary support to the Colombian parties in the speedy implementation of the agreement.

We are conscious of the sensitive issues that still require careful handling, including the expeditious approval by Congress of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the social and economic reintegration of former combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) into civilian life, access to land ownership, the provision of personal and collective security and protection measures, the absence or inadequate presence of State institutions in places left by FARC-EP combatants, the continuous killings of community leaders, former FARC-EP members and their relatives, as well as other issues highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General that could potentially create political complications.

We raise those matters because we care about the process. As I said earlier, we draw great inspiration from events in Colombia. While we commend the continued political will being demonstrated by the Government with regard to legal guarantees, more must be done to accelerate the full implementation of the amnesty law and resolve all other outstanding issues.

With regard to the negotiations between the Colombian Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), we recall the Council's condemnation in January of renewed attacks by the ELN. We are encouraged by reports that the two parties have now resumed the fifth round of negotiations to broker an improved ceasefire agreement. We urge the parties to engage in constructive discussions in good faith in order to reach a new ceasefire and a permanent peace agreement. We commend Special Representative Arnault, as well as United Nations personnel in Colombia, on all their efforts in support of the peace

agreement. We also reiterate our appreciation to countries of the region and other international partners that continue to closely support and accompany the implementation of the peace agreement.

Lastly, we take this opportunity to reaffirm our continued support for the full implementation of the Colombian Peace Agreement and stand in solidarity with the people and Government of Colombia in their exemplary efforts to transition to sustainable peace.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the fact that the continued success of the process is critical not only to the people of Colombia but to the entire world. We hope that Colombians will continue to rally behind the Peace Agreement and support the sustainable implementation of the accord. The successful holding of the presidential elections in Colombia, whose first round is scheduled for 27 May, will be vital to ensure continued progress.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I believe we all sit here today with a heavy heart because we have lost our brother and friend, Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue was kind and caring. He always had a smile on his face and his laughter was contagious. I do not know how we come to terms with the fact that we lost him so soon. I have no doubt that he is telling jokes in heaven. I would like to extend our condolences to the people of Côte d'Ivoire and to let them know that we feel their sorrow and pain. He represented them well. With that, I will say that we have lost the sweetest among us. I think that he would always want us to remember the reasons we are here and our goal. I think that that would be the greatest tribute we could pay to his memory.

I would like to thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing. I would also like to welcome the participation of the Vice-President of Colombia and presence of the Foreign Minister in the Council.

After a week in which the Council had six separate meetings in an effort to stop the bloodshed in Syria, preserving and cultivating an existing peace agreement takes on special meaning. The Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, which ended five decades of war in Colombia, has created the conditions for the just and lasting peace that Colombians deserve. It was a historic achievement, but peace in Colombia remains an unfinished project. All of us have a role to play in ensuring that it succeeds.

First, we should give credit where credit is due. We have seen significant and visible progress in the early phases of the implementation of the Peace Agreement. In just over six months, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) handed over thousands of weapons and explosives. It has also transformed itself into a political party and participated in elections.

For its part, the Government has begun reincorporating thousands of ex-combatants into civilian life. It has established transitional justice institutions. The challenge remains for the Government to expand its presence throughout the country. We cannot allow areas formerly controlled by FARC-EP to fall into the hands of criminals and illegal armed groups. That would undo much of the progress of the peace accord. We encourage the Government to continue efforts to eliminate Colombia's ungoverned spaces. The United States also urges the Government to continue the full implementation of the comprehensive peace plan, which includes efforts to reintegrate former combatants into civilian life.

The peace accord provides an important opportunity to address historical land issues that have driven conflict and violence in Colombia. We welcome President Santos Calderón's landmark decree meant to formalize land ownership for more than 2.5 million farmers. Improving access to land is essential to transforming rural livelihoods. Criminal groups and narcotraffickers have dominated rural areas of Colombia for decades. With secure land titles, the Colombian people can provide for their families without feeling beholden to those groups. It will also help achieve sustainable solutions to reducing coca cultivation, prevent violence against human rights defenders, and build a strong foundation for lasting peace in Colombia.

But peace is a two-way process, and the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) has significant responsibilities too. For peace to succeed, FARC must honour its commitments under the agreement. It must provide compensation to victims of the conflict. Restoring trust in Colombia's institutions after so many years of conflict will be extremely difficult. In fact, it will be impossible if FARC does not cooperate. FARC must participate fully and honestly in the transitional justice process. During my trip to the region in February, I saw the tremendous role that Colombia is playing to combat drug trafficking in Central America. That is another good sign for the peace process. The success of the Peace Agreement

is inseparable from our shared efforts against drug trafficking.

The United States and Colombia have set a goal of reducing cocaine production and coca cultivation in Colombia by 50 per cent in 2023. We encourage the Government to recognize drug trafficking for the damage it does to the social, economic and security well-being of the country. The Government must accelerate its counter-narcotics effort. FARC should also live up to its obligations to end its involvement in drug trafficking and share any information it has on drug-trafficking routes. Drugs fuelled the conflict in Colombia and eroded its Government and civic institutions. The United States stands ready to continue to assist in the recovery.

Finally, we would like to thank the Government of Colombia and the Vice-President for all they have done to help the Venezuelans flooding into the country to escape the oppressive Maduro Moros regime. At a time when Colombians have had their hands full consolidating the peace of their own country, they have stepped up to the challenge of helping others. We are grateful not just for their kindness but for the leadership Colombia is showing. The United States is fully committed to supporting Colombia and the implementation of the peace accord. The challenges are real, but the outlook is bright. We look forward to our continued friendship and partnership with a stronger, safer Colombia in the years to come.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Today is a sad day for the Security Council family. The sudden and untimely death of Mr. Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue last evening has left us all stunned and speechless. On behalf of Kazakhstan, I offer our sincerest condolences to the Government, the nation and the people of Côte d'Ivoire for having lost one of their outstanding diplomats, whose life we honour today in the Council.

Bernard was one of us, and his loss is irreplaceable for he exemplified all that is finest in diplomacy, dignity and the best of humanity and compassion. With a distinguished life dedicated to the service of his country, he reflected an immense depth of political acumen and wisdom that touched us deeply. His presence on the Council gave us invaluable insights into how a country emerging from the ravages of war can undergo a remarkable transformation to take a seat on the apex organ of the United Nations and contribute to peace and security. An excellent diplomat of quiet grace and inner strength, a true gentleman, loyal friend and beautiful soul, he will continue to live in our hearts and memories.

Turning now to the topic that convenes us today, I would like to welcome Colombian Vice-President, His Excellency Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, and Foreign Minister Maria Holguin Cuellar to the Security Council. I would also like to thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing today and for the tireless efforts of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia towards ensuring a peaceful future for the country.

My delegation commends the leadership of Colombia for its firm dedication and strong commitment to the peace process, irrespective of the huge challenges it faces. We also commend the United Nations role in accompanying the peace process, including the visits of the Secretary-General in January, the Department of Political Affairs partners' field visit in February and the President of the General Assembly's trip in March to Colombia.

It has been three months since the Colombian peace process entered its second year. During these three months, we have observed remarkable positive developments in the ongoing peace process. In that context, I would like to underline the first parliamentary elections held in Colombia last March after a historic peace deal was achieved in 2016. According to the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2018/279), these were the most inclusive elections in decades.

In view of the upcoming presidential elections in Colombia, we believe that the new President and Government will continue to show the same political will and commitment to implementing the ongoing peace process and putting the victims of the armed conflict at the centre of the Colombian political agenda. Kazakhstan highly appreciates the efforts of the Colombian Government and former rebels of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) in the overall peaceful conduct of the elections.

We also note the launch of Colombia's transitional justice tribunal — the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. That mechanism, together with the Commission on Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons, is the core of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace. Its role is essential to the successful continuation of the peace process. We look

forward to the other peace-related pending legislation being approved soon, guaranteeing the peace accord's full implementation and securing its irreversibility for the benefit of all Colombians.

Kazakhstan joins others in particularly commending the signing of the landmark decree that will formalize the land ownership of 2.5 million Colombian farmers. That was provided in the peace deal and the implementation of that promise opens the door to improving the quality of life of Colombian peasants. Moreover, given the fact that land ownership was the root cause of the more than half-of-a-century armed conflict, we believe that the legalization of land titles is key to peacebuilding.

Colombia still has a complicated journey ahead in order to achieve long-lasting peace. We need to address the alarming trends that, inter alia, have resulted in the killings of social and community leaders and human rights defenders, triggered in part by a power vacuum in the territories that were abandoned by the ex-combatants, which is of particular concern and might call the effective implementation of the peace process into question.

It will therefore be crucial to strengthen the nexus linking security and development, enhance efforts to achieve the socioeconomic reintegration of former FARC-EP rebels, ensure employment and adequate living standards and promote health care and educational and productive projects for those victims most affected by the conflict, including women, children and ethnic and indigenous communities. We urge the Government of Colombia to maintain its focus on providing concrete avenues to reintegration for former combatants in rural communities and on preventing increases in insecurity by expanding the State presence and State services. At the same time, the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común should also live up to its obligations and contribute to the peace process.

We welcome the constructive and wise decision of the Colombian Government to restart peace talks in Quito with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), which were frozen in January after a spate of ELN attacks. Kazakhstan hopes that the fifth cycle of talks, which were resumed on 15 March, will contribute to achieving a new bilateral ceasefire, which could pave the way for a permanent peace agreement with the ELN. Kazakhstan reiterates its firm commitment to the Colombian peace process and calls on all interested parties to do their best to foster reconciliation. From now on, the success of the peace process will entirely depend on the commitment of all parties to the concept of the peace deal, and will come to fruition only if they are united in their will to eliminate conflict and effectively live in peace. We therefore encourage all Colombians to work hard in order to overcome challenges and facilitate and expedite the establishment of lasting peace in the country. Kazakhstan strongly supports the Government of Colombia and stands ready to join multilateral and regional efforts to accelerate the momentum of the peace process that will ultimately bring about stability, progress and prosperity for all Colombians.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): We are all in a state of shock following the death of our colleague and friend Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. On behalf of France and on a personal level, I want to once again express our heartfelt condolences and deep sympathy to his family, friends and all the members of the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire. The United Nations has lost a great professional, Côte d'Ivoire an excellent representative, and France a friend whose limitless kindness will continue to inspire us.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jean Arnault for his very informative briefing, as well as for his commitment and exemplary effort. I also thank the Vice-President and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia for their presence here today and their tireless work in negotiating and implementing the Peace Agreement concluded with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP).

On behalf of France, I would like to once again pay tribute here to the political courage of the Colombian authorities, which took the initiative of launching the historic peace process with FARC-EP. Colombia's commitment to peace is a source of inspiration for us all, as the Ambassador of Ethiopia so eloquently said earlier. The United Nations, in general, and the Security Council, in particular, have played their full roles in providing the necessary support for the disarmament and political transition of that armed group. Since September 2017 that support has been manifested through ensuring the monitoring of the reintegration of former combatants, which is a crucial step towards the lasting implementation of the peace agreement. With regard to the mandate for the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, the Organization's

second Mission to that country, I will briefly underscore three points.

First, France congratulates the Colombian authorities on the organization and successful holding of the 11 March congressional elections, which the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), the new political party that resulted from the peace process, participated in. Colombian institutions and the Peace Agreement have been strengthened by that democratic exercise, as a result of which former combatants will become members of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives. The opening of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace to the public also represents a significant step towards the political reintegration of former combatants. We encourage the current Government and, more generally, all of the country's political groups, to consolidate the progress made and move forward towards the full implementation of the Peace Agreement between Colombia and FARC-EP. Particular attention should be given to the issue of amnesty for prisoners, as provided for in the Agreement.

My second point concerns the security of the women and men who are working to bring peace to the conflict-affected areas. We welcome the steps taken by the Colombian Government to end the high level of violence in those areas, in particular the murders of civil-society leaders, human rights defenders and people involved in coca substitution programmes. Despite the commitment of the authorities, the situation remains worrisome. The local populations have not seen much evidence of the peace dividends. We therefore encourage efforts to deploy State services to those areas, whether through security forces or civil institutions. It will also be crucial to combat impunity for crimes committed within the context of the conflict, including extrajudicial executions, whether by investigating the perpetrators of such crimes or those who ordered violent acts.

Lastly, I would once again like to draw attention to a critical point related to reintegration and the future of the peace process, which is access to land and sources of income. Once the issue of access to land, including the restitution of land that was seized during the conflict and is under legal proceedings, has been settled, it is economic projects that will provide former combatants with the prospect of a future within the Colombian national community. Such economic reintegration will be key to the lasting success of the peace process. It will continue to enjoy broad support from the international community, including France and the European Union, through various financial instruments. Ensuring peace in territories that have been ravaged by conflict for more than 50 years depends on it.

France, which supported President Santos Calderón's efforts to achieve peace from the beginning, hopes that the Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government and FARC-EP will be recorded in history as the end of a conflict and the beginning of a new era in Colombia in which former combatants will have their place in Colombian society and other groups will follow the example of FARC. We hope that the Colombian Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional will reach a new ceasefire as soon as possible and that negotiations will enable the achievement of a historic peace in Colombia that will send an exemplary message of hope to the world.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to join you, Mr. President, and our colleagues around the table in expressing my shock and deep sadness at the sudden death of Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to his family and his colleagues at the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and our thoughts are with them at this tragic time. Bernard had a distinguished career in the service of his country, and that was very much reflected in his approach on the Security Council. He always made time for dialogue with us. He was keen to hear other perspectives and ready to share his own experience. His contributions to our deliberations were always thoughtful, considered and insightful, and our discussions here will be all the poorer as a result of his absence. Côte d'Ivoire has lost one of its finest diplomats, and we have lost a dear friend and colleague.

Let me now turn to Colombia. I too would like to thank Special Representative Jean Arnault for his valuable briefing to the Council. I want to assure him of Sweden's continued firm support for his efforts and the work of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia. I also acknowledge and welcome the presence of Mr. Óscar Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia, and María Holguín Cuéllar, Colombia's Minister for Foreign Affairs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them and President Santos Calderón for their personal commitment to the peace process.

We commend both parties' firm commitment to peace, as well as their efforts to overcome challenges in the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the Government of Colombia. Last year saw the successful laying down of arms and the conversion of FARC-EP into a political party. The congressional elections held on 11 March this year were the most inclusive and least violent in decades, demonstrating how peace is already benefiting Colombia and Colombians.

Recognizing and addressing the legacy of conflict is essential to reconciliation and to building a peaceful future. We welcome the fact that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace has begun its crucial work. It was designed and agreed on with the priority objective of guaranteeing truth, justice, reparation and no relapse into conflict. We hope that its procedures will be rapidly agreed on.

According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/279), threats, violence and killings of human rights defenders, community leaders, FARC-EP members and their families have continued. Needless to say, this is deeply worrying and underscores the importance of ensuring that the State can fill the power vacuum and safeguard the rule of law and respect for human rights throughout the country.

The full political, legal and socioeconomic reintegration of former FARC-EP members is vital. That includes ensuring progress on the application of amnesty provisions, productive projects and the key issue of access to land for reintegration. In that regard, we hope that the decree allowing former combatants access to land to will be approved as soon as possible. A sustained effort from all parts of the Government in support of the wider Peace Agreement, including comprehensive rural reform, is needed so that the Agreement can begin delivering tangible peace dividends for all Colombians as soon as possible. Ensuring a stronger presence of civilian authorities and agencies providing goods and services to conflict-affected communities will be helpful in that regard.

Women played an important role in making peace in Colombia. The gender perspective must now be mainstreamed in all aspects of the implementation, and not least in the areas of reintegration and security. We call on the parties to ensure that protection efforts cover the specific challenges regarding the protection of women, including measures for enhanced prevention and responses to gender-based violence, as recommended in the Secretary-General's report.

We welcome the resumption of talks between the Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional, and reiterate that the United Nations and the Security Council must stand ready to assist the parties in monitoring a renewed ceasefire. Sweden, as a member of the group of countries for support, accompaniment and cooperation at the negotiating table, will assist the process as much as it can.

Colombia also demonstrates how a united Security Council can contribute to peace. At this critical time in the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the United Nations and Colombia's international partners must continue to lend their full support to the parties. Colombia's Peace Agreement represents the culmination of a historic process that has brought an end to more than 50 years of conflict and violence. It shows that even the most entrenched conflicts can be brought to an end through dialogue and diplomacy, setting an irreversible course for peace. By remaining committed to the Peace Agreement, the parties are keeping faith with the hopes and aspirations of the Colombian people for the future of their country. We must continue to do all we can to support them in that.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of Russia, I would first like to express our condolences to the nearest and dearest of our colleague and friend Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoué, the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire, on his untimely passing. We will greatly miss his sense of humour, constructive attitude, professionalism and enthusiasm for the issues on the Council's agenda. He has done a great deal for his country and for the people of Côte d'Ivoire. We share their pain and sorrow. This is a severe blow to the United Nations diplomatic corps. May his soul rest in peace.

To return to this morning's topic, I want to welcome Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia, and María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar, Colombia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, to our meeting.

We are here today to discuss the situation in Colombia since the holding of parliamentary elections on 11 March. That was an important and significant event, considering that the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) took part in the elections for the first

time, after decades in opposition. Despite the modest results, that political force will represent the interests of its supporters. We congratulate Colombia and the Colombians on that achievement. Thanks to the sense of national responsibility they have demonstrated, the country has been able to take another very important step towards a sustainable peace.

We thank Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his presentation of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/279). Both the briefing and the report confirm that a lot of work remains to be done. We should have no illusions about that. Despite the fact that the country's situation has changed for the better by comparison to the war years, some chronic problems contain to present obstacles to strengthening sustainable peace, which is why we wholeheartedly endorse the support that the United Nations presence provides to Colombians under the leadership of Mr. Arnault. It was the support of the first special political mission, which completed its work last September, that helped Colombians to secure major gains in the peace process. In the wake of the ceasefire ending many years of conflict and the signing of the Final Peace Agreement at the end of 2016, the United Nations Mission in Colombia ensured the completion of the surrender of weapons by FARC-EP. Former combatants began to arrive in the reintegration zones, in spite of some problems with setting them up, as the Head of the Mission reported.

These successes enabled the Council to start discussing the shift to the second phase, that of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia. Issued six months after the start of the Verification Mission's work, the Secretary-General's report has pointed to a number of serious problems, particularly the bureaucratic obstacles that the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) encountered during a crucial stage of its electoral campaign. Unfortunately, the number of murders of former combatants and communal leaders has also increased exponentially. Against that backdrop, illegal armed groups have taken control of lands that had previously been liberated by FARC-EP, despite the announcement of the Horus plan, which is meant to ensure Government control in such areas. Furthermore, another topic that has provoked a significant reaction in Colombian society was missing from the report — the arrest on 9 April of Jesús Santrich, one of the negotiators of the Final Peace Agreement and a member of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común party who, as we know, was supposed to take up his parliamentary seat. We were pleased with Mr. Arnault's information that the key agreements of the parties remain in force. Together with the United Nations Mission, we will carefully monitor the process and the applicability, in this situation, of Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a key component of the Final Peace Agreement and therefore a guarantee of peace.

All of these issues will require careful attention from the Government, the United Nations Mission and the international community, which rightly see Colombia as an example of post-conflict rebuilding. Not to mention how attentively the Ejército de Liberación Nacional is watching the development of events.

All of that places a special responsibility on the Verification Mission, which should be fully mobilized and focused on fulfilling its mandate on schedule. That is especially important in the run-up to the presidential elections.

We believe that all parties must continue to adhere strictly to the outcome of the Peace Agreement in its current form by all parties, regardless of whatever changes await the country's Government. In that context, we will be paying close attention to the statements of the candidates. It is important to remember that the authority of the Security Council and the Secretary-General is invested in the success of the peace process.

For our part, we once again affirm our readiness to continue to support the people and the Government of Colombia in building lasting peace and sustainable post-conflict development.

Ms. Samson (Netherlands): At the outset, on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I would like to express our deep condolences to the family, loved ones and colleagues at the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire on the sudden passing of Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. He will be sorely missed as a colleague and friend who was truly committed to the values of the United Nations and the work of the Security Council.

Turning to Colombia, I would like to start by thanking Mr. Arnault, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his clear and detailed briefing. We commend him and the United Nations Verification Mission for the excellent work that they are doing and assure them of our full support. I also want to express our

sincere appreciation for the presence of Vice-President Naranjo Trujillo and Foreign Minister Holguín Cuéllar with us here today. Their presence demonstrates the ongoing commitment of their Government to continuing to pursue peace.

The peace process is transforming Colombia. The participation of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) political party in the peaceful democratic parliamentary elections held on 11 March was a milestone, and we congratulate all stakeholders on the progress achieved. I would like to make three points today. The first is on the need to improve the security situation; the second is on the need for the inclusive reintegration of former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the full and effective participation of women in the peace process; and the third is on the importance of a new ceasefire between the Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN).

First, I would like to highlight the importance of improving the security situation in former conflict areas. Significant progress has been made so far. However, sustainable peace can be achieved only once the civilians living in those areas can benefit from the peace dividend. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is concerned about new armed-group activity in those areas. We welcome the Horus plan and encourage its further implementation in coordination with other national efforts to restore State authority. That includes strengthening civilian institutions and the provision of services. Improving the security situation is a first step towards the sustainable development of such areas and a peaceful future for its inhabitants.

The problematic security situation in former conflict areas has also led to an increase in threats and acts of violence against community and social leaders and human rights defenders. Their protection should be a key priority, particularly given the upcoming elections. We appreciate the Colombian Government's increased efforts to ensure that, which should translate into an improved security situation on the ground. However, those responsible for the threats and violence must also be held to account.

My second point is that inclusivity is a condition for the success of the peace process, and ensuring it is an important way to address the root causes of the conflict. The political, socioeconomic and legal reintegration of former FARC-EP members must remain a priority. That includes progress on the amnesty provisions, access to land and productive projects. In particular, the Kingdom of the Netherlands calls for women's full and effective participation in the peace process. That includes the implementation of the specific gender provisions regarding security guarantees and the reintegration of female former combatants. In that light, we welcome the forum for gender focal points to be organized by the United Nations Verification Mission, to which the Netherlands has contributed.

Our third point is a message of support for the resumption of negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the ELN. We hope that the recent challenges will be overcome and that the negotiations will continue. We encourage all parties to commit to a ceasefire agreement and to give peace a chance. The Netherlands stands ready to support Colombia, including as a member of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the peace process in Colombia, as well as the people of Colombia. We therefore call on all stakeholders to continue their efforts to implement and uphold the Peace Agreement now, during the months ahead and in the years to come. Together, they can change the future of Colombia.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Today is a particularly sad day for my country, Côte d'Ivoire, which has just lost its Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, who died yesterday afternoon. I would like to thank all United Nations delegations for the many messages of support and solidarity they have conveyed to my country and to my delegation in particular, which continues to be deeply affected by this sudden passing. Bernard, as his Security Council colleagues affectionately called him, was passionate about his work. He was a kind man who was always smiling and attentive to his colleagues and co-workers. I am sure that the Security Council will miss him. As co-workers, we already miss him.

As the poet has said, there are tears that never stop flowing, voids that are never filled, memories that nothing can take away and people who can never be replaced. Smiles return, but only to cover the grief. Everything has been said but words can change nothing.

The sun has set over a fulfilled life but it will continue to shine in the garden of our memories.

Returning to today's meeting, my delegation thanks the Peruvian presidency for holding this briefing on the peace process in Colombia. We would also like to commend Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his excellent briefing. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to welcome the Vice-President of Colombia, who has been kind enough to grace today's meeting with his presence.

Côte d'Ivoire has been following the evolving sociopolitical situation in Colombia with great interest since the start of an intra-Colombian peace process two years ago. Our statement will focus on the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, the challenges in implementing it and the role of the international community, particularly the United Nations, in supporting the peace process. With regard to the implementation of the Peace Agreement, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the significant progress that has been made at various levels.

On the political front, my delegation welcomed the peaceful holding on 11 March of the first inclusive Colombian legislative elections, in which 73 candidates from the political party of the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) participated. Beyond their results, the legislative elections represent an important step in the intra-Colombian reconciliation and peace process. My delegation hopes that the presidential election scheduled for May will further strengthen such achievements. In that context, Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the decision of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón to resume the negotiations with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional that were suspended in the wake of several attacks perpetrated by that group. Their resumption could clearly help to de-escalate the conflict.

On the judicial front, it is important to welcome the effective start of the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which continues to be an essential component of the transitional justice system, to implement of the Peace Agreement of November 2016.

With regard to security, my country welcomes the establishment by the Colombian authorities of appropriate mechanisms to provide an institutional response to the deterioration of the security situation. My delegation also notes with satisfaction the emergence of a national consensus between Colombian institutions and civil society with regard to the protection of the lives and roles of the social leaders who are working to promote land restitution and to protect resources and the environment. My delegation congratulates the Colombian Government on the work it has accomplished and encourages it to continue to strive to remove all obstacles. Despite the that progress, the implementation of the Peace Agreement faces many challenges, including in the areas of socioeconomic reintegration, security and justice.

At the socioeconomic level, my country calls on the Government of Colombia to continue the reforms initiated by taking concrete measures to reintegrate former FARC-EP members and allowing access to land ownership and the development of productive projects and cooperatives. We urge the Government to take all the measures likely to improve the living conditions in ex-combatant assembly centres and to facilitate their successful socioeconomic integration.

In terms of security, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the resurgence of violence, as well as by the killings of some former FARC-EP leaders. We welcome the determination of the Colombian authorities to pay close attention to these issues in order to ensure the safety of all Colombians without exception.

In view of the complexity of the ongoing peace process, my delegation reiterates the need for the Security Council to fully support the peace and reconciliation efforts of the Government of Colombia. My country commends the commitment and work done in Colombia by the Verification Mission and the United Nations country team. We welcome in particular the actions undertaken in the areas of peacebuilding, gender equality, child protection and ethnic and cultural integration. My delegation also welcomes the close cooperation between the Verification Mission and the United Nations country team, which was deemed necessary in consolidating and sustaining the efforts of the Colombian authorities for lasting peace.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire would like to assure the Colombian authorities of its support and determination to work with them to ensure the success of the peace and reconciliation process in Colombia.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my people and my Government, as well as on my own behalf, I wish to join the other members of the Security Council

in expressing my sadness at the tragic and unexpected loss of our good friend, Mr. Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. We extend our condolences to his family and friends, the Côte d'Ivoire mission staff and to the people and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. We have all lost a good friend, a great colleague and an excellent diplomat. I personally mourn because I feel that I have lost a brother.

Turning to the subject of today's meeting, Bolivia welcomes the presence of the Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, Mr. Óscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar; and our sister Ms. Mejía Vélez, Permanent Representative of Colombia. Likewise, we wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Colombia, Mr. Jean Arnault, for sharing with the Council the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/279). We also wish to thank Mr. Arnault for his excellent work, his commitment, his dedication to this issue and for his professionalism. We also welcome the presence at this meeting of the many ambassadors and representatives from my region of Latin America and the Caribbean. Their presence demonstrates the unwavering commitment of my entire region to the peace process.

In the various missions carried out by the Security Council during the past two administrations, Bolivia has seen the peace process in Colombia held up as an example by several leaders from around the world. The determination and commitment of both parties throughout that time has shown that it is possible to achieve results that many deemed impossible. They ended half a century of war and gave hope to millions of Colombians living in fear. They made it possible for the members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) to surrender their weapons and become a political party; and they have turned Colombia into a point of reference for other countries going through similar situations.

The participation of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) in the 11 March legislative elections despite the obstacles is a historic event and a significant step forward in the transition of Colombia from conflict to peace. The peace process today is perhaps confronting the most difficult challenges since its start. Frustration, a sense of uncertainty and hate speech are on the rise in the face of the upcoming elections and issues that neither the Government nor FARC have been able to confront. In spite of all that, hearing the President of Colombia and the leader of FARC reiterate their unshakeable commitment to the process sustains the hope of all those who trust that Colombia has embraced a path to peace from which there is no turning back.

There are disagreements that will not disappear overnight. The war has left consequences that cannot be easily resolved and that do not allow the people that have lived in conflict to flourish fully. However, after seven attempts at dialogue over many years, Colombia finally reached a Peace Agreement that satisfied the needs of both parties and turned to the Security Council to support its implementation. The trust placed in the Council demonstrates the importance of this United Nations organ for the world. If the peace process does not move ahead, it will not be not only a failure for Colombia but for all of us. It will be a failure for negotiation, which is one of the most important political tools that make it possible for humankind to peacefully resolve their disputes. That is one of the fundamental values on which the Organization is based.

Six months ago, we began the most complicated phase of the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, which is the political, economic and social reintegration into society of former FARC-EP combatants. We commend the measures devised by the Government to overcome pending issues in the areas of legal, security and socioeconomic guarantees. However, it is important to step up efforts to accelerate the implementation of those measures.

First and foremost, Bolivia is of the view that to guarantee appropriate reintegration into civilian life, it is essential to comply fully with what is set out in the agreement in terms of legal reintegration. We urge progress in certifying and applying amnesty measures for the approximately 400 former FARC-EP members who remain imprisoned. We also underscore the start of the activities of a Special Jurisdiction for Peace. It is important to uphold the scope of the Special Jurisdiction so that the victims at the centre of these efforts can access justice and truth.

Secondly, it is essential to strengthen security in the areas that have been most affected by the conflict. The increase during the reporting period in the number of murders of social leaders, former FARC-

EP members and their family members are alarming. Most of the killings have taken place outside the areas previously controlled by FARC-EP, which means that it is important that the authorities provide security guarantees to surrounding zones.

Thirdly, it is important to implement concrete measures to make progress in comprehensive rural reform. We believe that formalizing access to land is essential to guarantee stable and lasting peace. That could bolster the trust of the former combatants in the reintegration process.

With regard to the process of negotiations with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional, we would like to express our support for the resumption of dialogue. That should lead to the establishment of a definitive cessation of hostilities and a process that makes it possible to achieve just and lasting peace.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the commitment, dedication and work being carried out daily by Special Representative Arnault and the entire Mission team. We would also like to reiterate the wholehearted support of Bolivia for the peace process led by the Government of Colombia and FARC. We underscore the conviction and commitment demonstrated by President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and the leaders of FARC to consolidate peace in Colombia. The peace that is being built is not only the birthright of the Colombian people; it has become the heritage of the entire world.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to join other colleagues who preceded me to convey my condolences for the passing of our colleague and friend Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire. We will truly miss him. He was always a smiling and loving friend. We will miss his presence today and in future. Bernard served his country with high professionalism. He was a distinguished diplomat whom I knew for more than 20 years at the United Nations. In my name and on behalf of my colleagues in the Kuwaiti Mission, and on behalf of the Government of the State of Kuwait, allow me to express our condolences to the family of Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, his colleagues in the Permanent Mission, his friends as well as the Government of Côte d'Ivoire.

Turning to the topic at hand, I would like at the outset to welcome the participation of the Vice-President and the Foreign Minister of Colombia in this meeting. Their presence here today is a clear indication of interest shown by the Colombian Government achieving a durable and stable peace in Colombi also thank Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representativ the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nat Verification Mission in Colombia, for his valu briefing and comprehensive presentation on the r prominent achievements made as well as the challe that face the peace process in Colombia. We take opportunity to renew our support for the Colom peace process, which will be an example to draw u in order to resolve other conflicts before us.

I would like to focus on three main aspe first, the current political developments; secon the reintegration of former members of the Fue Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejercito Pueblo (FARC-EP); and, thirdly, the role of the Un Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

With regard to current political developments results of the parliamentary elections held last m are a clear indication of how serious the Colom Government and parties to the conflict are a achieving a durable and stable peace in Colom That has always been one of the aspirations of Colombian people. The success of the elections, wit participation of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucion del Común (FARC) political party, previously FA EP, and the increase in participation by 5.2 cent — or approximately 3.6 million voters — const an important stage in the reintegration of the party the political scene after its members had directed weapons against the Government for over 50 y This is an additional step in the transition of Colo from conflict to peace and stability.

We call on all political parties to participate i presidential elections next month in order to consol sound and comprehensive political practices. We value and encourage the resumption of the p talks that started on 15 March 2018 in Quito bet the Colombian Government and the Ejército Liberación Nacional.

As for the reintegration of former membe FARC-EP, now the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucio del Común, we stress the important role playe the Colombian Government in cooperation United Nations agencies, such as the United Na Development Programme, UN-Women and the U Nations Mine Action Service, as well as internat

non-governmental organizations, in implementing the Peace Agreement and build capacities. The Colombian Government has issued a number of decrees on the Special Jurisdiction actions and the creation of a Special Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing, estimated to number 60,000 people, due to the conflict. All those important steps will help enhance trust between the relevant parties.

It is now essential that needed measures be taken in relation to security, legal, social and economic guarantees to protect and reintegrate former FARC-EP members into civil society as stated in the Peace Agreement, given that violence has again erupted in the most affected areas. Three members of the Ecuadorian press were killed recently. We stress that there is an urgent need to protect media personnel and humanitarian workers.

In conclusion, we would like to commend the great efforts of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, led by Mr. Jean Arnault, in coordination with national, regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, the private sector and the international community. The Mission has played a positive role in enhancing dialogue with women's associations in cooperation with UN-Women, and has provided protection to children through a reintegration programme for children associated with former FARC-EP members.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): We have received the news of the sudden and completely untimely passing of Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue with deep sadness and disbelief. On behalf of Poland, our Permanent Representative, Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, and our entire delegation, let me express our heartfelt condolences to the family of Ambassador Tanoh-Boutchoue and the entire team of the Côte d'Ivoire Mission. We will remember Bernard as a great diplomat and a cordial friend and colleague. He served Côte d'Ivoire with grace, wisdom and dignity. We will miss him deeply.

I now turn to the topic of today's discussion. I would like to warmly welcome His Excellency Mr. Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia, and Her Excellency Ms. Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia. I would also like to thank our briefer, Mr. Jean Arnault, for a very informative briefing.

With parliamentary elections completed and the presidential elections just around the corner, we are approaching a decisive point in the Colombian peace process, which has been an undeniable success for that country's society, the Colombian authorities as well as for the United Nations community. Poland fully supports the implementation of the Peace Agreement and commends every effort made by the people involved in the process — from the former guerillas now establishing farms in Pondores to the brave police officers on the streets of Medellin to the officials in Bogotá.

The legislative elections that took place on 11 March were Colombia's most peaceful in over 50 years. Voting and political participation reached new heights in virtually every department, showing the visible positive impact of the disarmament of over 90 per cent of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). In addition, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional has upheld a temporary unilateral ceasefire with the Government. Thanks to the Peace Agreement, 10 seats in Congress will now be taken by the representatives of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) political party. FARC's political transition should soon bear fruit.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that less than a year has elapsed since the disarmament of FARC-EP, there is growing mistrust on the part of ex-combatants that the Government will fail to completely fulfil its commitments to them. We should be aware that the positive momentum may be gradually fading away.

While awaiting appropriate legislative action, no land has been transferred to the collective agricultural projects. More than 600 FARC-EP members remain in prison due to bureaucratic delays in the implementation of the amnesty law. Development programmes and productive projects in the countryside should be approved, implemented and funded in a more coordinated way and without further delays. We reiterate the need to adopt a national reintegration plan linking reintegration to development. We strongly believe that the landmark decree enabling access to land ownership to former combatants will offer after its adoption the strongest incentive for a majority of former FARC-EP members, vastly helping them in the process of reintegration.

We welcome the recent progress made in the implementation of the Peace Agreement, in particular

the setting up of the special transitional justice courts and the Commission on Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition. Police and military casualties have dropped, and the number of internal internally displaced persons has fallen significantly. At the same time, homicide rates remain largely unchanged, and violence in former FARC-EP strongholds increased dramatically in the first months of 2018.

It is also worrying that the cultivation of illicit crops is steadily increasing. Many families have joined the crop substitution process, but little progress has been made in strengthening local markets for alternative products or in rural road construction. We cannot ignore the lack of coordination between the crop substitution programme and the Government's forced eradication efforts. Those issues are undermining trust between the Government and local communities.

As we have stated before, current reintegration efforts lack a gender perspective and comprehensive initiatives made especially for FARC-EP women. Durable peace can be achieved only when all people — women and men — are equally and in a meaningful way involved in the peace process.

In conclusion, Poland supports the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, which continues to play a vital role in supporting the Peace Agreement. We also commend the role of the United Nations country team and every United Nations agency for being present on the ground. We note in particular the role of the United Nations Mine Action Service, which aims at bringing an end to the suffering of Colombians as a result of the widespread presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

We believe that the stakes for peace in Columbia are higher than ever. Poland strongly supports the Colombian Government's efforts to make the peace process a success.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin this statement by remembering my brother and friend, Mr. Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue. I had the good fortune of sitting next to Bernard during these three and a half months of our presence in the Security Council, during which time we served each other glasses of water and cough drops and relayed jokes and thoughts about the high and complex responsibility we shared as representatives of our respective countries on the Security Council. I was able to measure and assess the very high quality of Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue as a person. He was jovial, friendly, simple, humble, a great professional diplomat and a person who, once one knew him, one had the impression of having known him for years. His sudden physical disappearance is a great blow to the diplomatic community of the United Nations in general and to the Group of African States and the African members of the Council in particular. We express our deepest condolences to his bereaved family, his compatriots and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. May the Almighty Lord take him to his breast. May my dear friend and brother rest in peace.

I wish to welcome His Excellency the Vice-President of Colombia, Mr. Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo, and Her Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Ms. Maria Angela Holguin Cuéllar, and to thank them for being present at this meeting. Their presence is a testament to the great importance they attach to this issue.

Our delegation appreciates the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/279), which has just been presented to us by Special Representative Mr Jean Arnault. We commend him for the important, clear and detailed information he has just given us, but also for the arduous and difficult work he and his team are undertaking in Colombia in the framework the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia for the political, economic and social integration of former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), as well as to guarantee their security and that of the communities affected by the conflict in Colombia.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends the progress achieved in the Colombian political process, including the holding of legislative elections on 11 March, which represented an important step in the transition of Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común from weapons to politics and in Colombia's transition from conflict to peace. The success in terms of participation is an endorsement by the Colombian people of the peace process and a statement that the process is irreversible. We hope that the same spirit will prevail in the upcoming presidential elections, and that political actors will demonstrate maturity and good political sense and help to consolidate that political process.

The development of events in Colombia is a good example of how frank, direct and inclusive negotiations can lead to resolving a problem when there is a sincere will to move forward and leave 50 years of conflict behind. The international community's support in that process has been and continues to be very important. Challenges remain, such as the security of former FARC-EP combatants in some areas of the country, their socioeconomic reintegration and reinsertion, the lack of a functioning legal framework providing them access to land, the murders of community and social leaders and so forth. Those aspects must be taken into account, as they could delay the permanent strengthening of the process.

The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends the Colombian authorities on the measures they have taken to secure the process, such as strengthening security measures in the most affected areas, the investigation of the murders of former combatants and community leaders by the Office of the Attorney General and the adoption of legal measures regulating access to land, which are all steps in the right direction. The resumption of talks with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional is a very positive step, which should lead to the complete restoration of peace in Colombia. That would undoubtedly help the country to explore and develop its full economic potential.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the Security Council and the international community to continue to fully support the peace process in Colombia and to respect the leadership of the Government and the people of Colombia in that process with constructive assistance.

In conclusion, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea reiterates its support for the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and all Colombian actors and encourages them to continue their efforts to fully achieve irreversible peace in the beautiful country that is Colombia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

We thank Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, for his briefing. We reiterate our full support for the important work he is doing with his team. I would like to welcome in particular the participation of Vice-President Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo, Minister for Foreign Affairs María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar and Permanent Representative María Emma Mejía Vélez, and underscore their commitment and the important role they are playing in supporting peace.

Peru reaffirms its determined support for the peace process in the sisterly Republic of Colombia. We would like to note the courage of its Government in resolving the long-standing conflict with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) through a negotiated solution, which enjoyed international support during negotiations and the Security Council's commitment in implementing the Peace Agreement.

Building peace in Colombia is of course a complex process, and as such it faces major challenges. We therefore highlight the Government's efforts to adapt national legislation to the Peace Agreement; to ensure security; to entrench the State's presence throughout its territory and to promote the socioeconomic reintegration of former combatants, especially in rural areas. We also want to encourage the authorities and the people of Colombia to persevere in those efforts, to speed up the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to remain united in building sustainable peace.

Democracy and participation are key elements of peacebuilding. We welcome the massive turn-out by citizens in the parliamentary elections last month, which serves to underscore and confirm their democratic traditions. We are hopeful about the preparations for the upcoming presidential elections. We welcome the resumption of dialogue between the Government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional and encourage the continuation of talks.

As already stated, the process is complex and replete with challenges. In spite of significant progress made and the political will of the Government to implement the Peace Agreement, there are concerns about the murders reported outside of the training and reintegration areas. We underscore our strong condemnation of the murder of three Ecuadorian journalists, who were kidnapped by FARC-EP dissidents. We extend our condolences and solidarity to their relatives and to the sister nation of Ecuador. We believe that it is crucial to stand up resolutely to the enemies of peace. The validity of the rule of law is a core pillar of sustaining peace. We therefore underscore that fact that the Peace Agreement guarantees access to

justice for all parties to the conflict in Colombia and does not in any way encourage impunity.

We believe that Colombians can be optimistic about the future. Peace has led to a considerable increase in investment and tourism and a significant decrease in the murder rate. Colombia is now a vibrant country that is lucky to be given a second chance. According to a Colombian tourism advertisement, the only risk is wanting to stay.

We would like to conclude by voicing our support for the Verification Mission and for Mr. Arnault's work, as well as to underscore the unity of the Security Council with regard to the Colombian peace process. We reiterate Peru's commitment to sustaining peace in that sister country and the consolidation of the Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Vice-President of Colombia.

Mr. Naranjo Trujillo (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before I proceed, on behalf of the Colombian people, I would like to extend our condolences on the death of the Ambassador of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, who was a unconditional friend of peace and a pillar of support for Colombia. We deeply regret his passing.

I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your efforts and those of your delegation during your presidency of the Security Council. Similarly, I thank all of the members of the Council for their unwavering support for peace in Colombia. That support has been confirmed through the holding of today's meeting.

I also thank the Secretary-General for his balanced and objective report (S/2018/279). I also thank his Special Representative, Mr. Jean Arnault, for his committed, professional and admirable leadership, for which the Colombian people and the entire region will be forever grateful.

Peace in Colombia also means peace in the continent, our Latin American region. Rather than be discouraged about the underlying challenges to building peace, we reiterate our willingness to persist. Now is not the time to give up. Now is the time to continue to build peace. We have always said that seeking peace is a complex and difficult task. It took decades to create an environment conducive to negotiations. We also said that building peace through a negotiated solution to the conflict was also a complex and difficult challenge, but we achieved it. We now declare that building peace requires maximum energy and national will to ensure that it is not just a phenomenal value but an indelible one. Such peace is built day by day.

To that end, with the leadership of the President of Colombia, we reiterate before the Council today, based on the situation on the ground and on the conclusions of the Secretary-General when he underscored in his report that considerable progress had been made — for example, the laying down of weapons and the move towards legality by those who had posed a threat to Colombian institutions in the past — as well as when he pointed out the remaining challenges, that those challenges are being addressed as a matter of priority. During today's meeting — and we very much appreciate such impartiality — several problems that could be viewed through the prism of the glass being half empty were raised. What we still must do to consolidate peace begins with safeguarding the lives, integrity and freedom of our country's community leaders and human rights defenders throughout our territory.

That situation highlights a major contradiction in Colombia. We note that, although we have achieved the lowest murder rate in the past 42 years, there has been an increase in the number of leaders being killed. Now the conflict has ended, they have called for respect for the rule of law and speak out against illegal activities conducted during the armed conflict. It is sad to see the rural leaders who promote crop substitution being threatened by drug-related transnational crime. That is why I would like to reiterate that, instead of lowering our guard, undermining institutional capacity in an attempt to control the entire country and continuing to combat crime, Colombia is building capacity with the help of its long-standing allies. We do so because we understand that the principle of shared responsibility can work to rid the region of organized crime.

However, we face challenges that go beyond security itself and that pertain to those who laid down their weapons and chose democracy. Political participation is at the very core of consolidating peace. That is why we support many of the statements made by Ambassadors here in the Council today. They underscored the fact that, for the first time, an organization that has become a political party and laid down its weapons after half a century of fighting is taking part in elections and playing by the rules

of democracy. It is true that the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común, the political party, in its first elections, received fewer votes than expected but, at the same time, it is also true the institutional participatory framework has broadened considerably and has led to unprecedented parliamentary elections, with more than 2 million additional votes, as compared to previous elections. That points to a genuine and inclusive democracy, in particular with regard to those who laid down their weapons and embraced democratic values and principles. The Government will continue to provide such guarantees for political participation.

However, the report on the Mission also underscores the need to move forward so that the conditions exist for employment, social and economic reintegration. Another key issue is that of land. I would like to state here that we are moving towards the issuance of a final decree that states that those who reintegrate into society after laying down their weapons will be on equal footing with members of communities that were most affected by the conflict in order to have access to land and receive support for productive ventures as former fighters-cum-farmers. We are making progress to ensure that this transition to lawful order is a resounding success.

In that regard, today we can say that approximately 12,000 former combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) have opened bank accounts, received their basic monthly income and signed up for the national health-care, social and pension systems. Five thousand of those ex-combatants have laid down their weapons to take up paper and pen as they commence training and schooling processes. That means that we already have a significant group undergoing a real process of transformation.

We are moving forward in that, irrespective of the succeeding Government in a democracy, today, with our elections forthcoming, regardless of the Administration that succeeds us, it will have a clear and sound road map towards entrenching an irreversible peace in Colombia, the benefits of which will extend to the entire region. We cannot deny that we face challenges and difficulties of a historic magnitude — I am referring to the great tragedy that our nation suffered as it endured the scourge of drug-trafficking. For almost 40 years, we witnessed how the mafias undermined institutional stability, compromised the safety and security of communities and instigated, supported and promoted illegal crops and requisitioning.

Before the Council, I would like to say that Colombia has channelled its capacities, which were previously limited to containing the war machine during the conflict with FARC-EP, to make organized crime a joint priority. That is how we are able to reach areas that, over decades, had no Government presence and expel the ruthless drug traffickers who have caused so much damage. In that regard, I would like to reaffirm our commitment in solidarity to our neighbouring and friendly countries that they can rest assured that Colombia fully assumes its responsibility to not allow or tolerate such crime.

Furthermore, we are making strides in peacebuilding, which means bridging the gap between the rural parts of the country and its urban parts, for a strong Colombia that was, as I mentioned, confined by the armed conflict, leaving in its wake gaps of inequality that we need to bridge. For that reason, to build peace in Colombia today it is not enough to only comply with the peace agreements, but we must also adopt an agenda of reform and change, led by President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, that would enable the Colombian people, with their silent revolutions, to succeed. For example, presently 30,000 young people — from the humblest of backgrounds but also the brightest of our country — have received full scholarships to the best universities in our country. That revolution has also seen 5 million Colombians lifted out of abject poverty, as we have been negotiating and building peace over the years. We believe that peace should translate to greater equality, prosperity and education.

In that connection, I would like to express my appreciation for the various forms of support we have received. I reiterate that we hope to be able to continue to count on a Council that, in the face of difficulties, understands those difficulties and that does not rest on its laurels but, rather, encourages us to continue moving forward in overcoming challenges.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.